

THE BUFFALO BILL

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION **STORIES** DEVOTED TO BORDER LIFE

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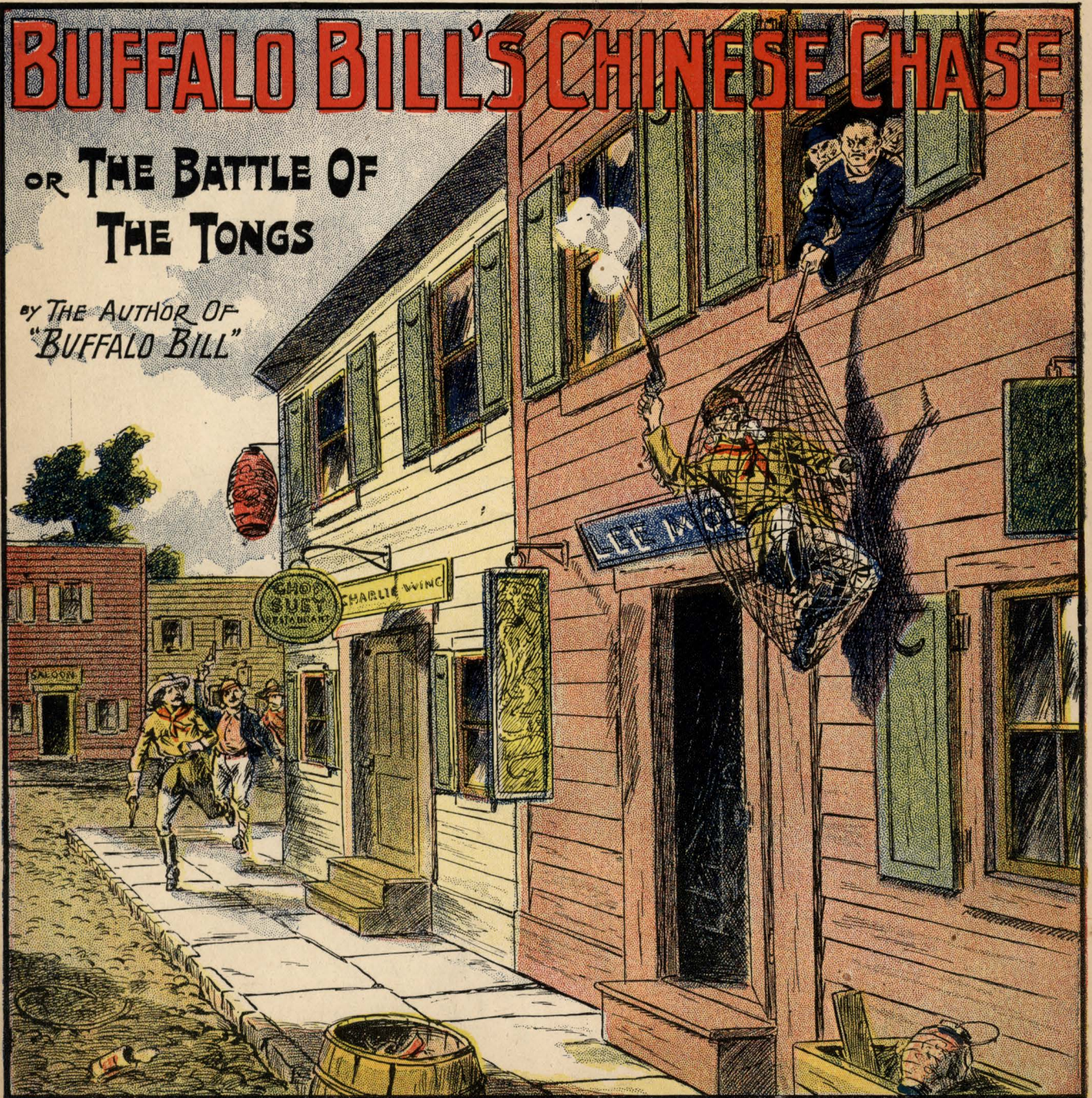
NEW YORK, DECEMBER 18, 1909.

Price, Five Cents

BUFFALO BILL'S CHINESE CHASE

OR THE BATTLE OF
THE TONGS

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"BUFFALO BILL"



As Buffalo Bill and his pards turned the corner, they beheld old Nick Nomad, enmeshed in a heavy net, being hauled up the side of a house by several desperate-looking Chinamen.

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 Beware of Wild West imitations of the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are about fictitious characters. The Buffalo Bill weekly is the only weekly containing the adventures of Buffalo Bill, (Col. W. F. Cody), who is known all over the world as the king of scouts.

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BUFFALO BILL'S CHINESE CHASE;

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CHAPTER I.

MARSHAL JAMESON "NORATES."

Jim Jameson, marshal of Cyanide, tipped himself back in his easy-chair, swung his heavy feet upon the window ledge, and stuck a lighted match to his fat cigar.

"Y' see, it's this way," he said. "Whether Bent Murdock went under er not, I don't know, and can't find out. Wish't I could; fer he was a neighbor o' mine, and was allus considered plum on the square until this thing happened."

He was addressing a small, dark man, who had come into his office a few minutes before. The stranger had given his name as Sam Lawson, and stated that he was an insurance detective, sent to Cyanide by the company that had issued a large insurance policy on Murdock's life. The heirs had already put in a claim against the company for payment of the policy, pushed to it, as they declared, by Murdock's creditors and the bank with which he had been connected. The company, so the little man had said, was disposed to contest the thing, and certainly would not hand over the money until they had positive proof that Murdock was dead.

Naturally, the first thing the insurance detective had done on arriving in Cyanide was to call on the Cyanide marshal.

"His friends and fambly believes," said Jameson, "that Murdock was helped off the planet by Chinese thugs, who wanted his roll. But as there's the hottest kind of a tong war goin' on down in Chinytown right now it's as much as a white man's life is wuth to poke round in there to find out. I've tried it, an' I know.

"The funny thing about it, too, is that on the surface everything down there is as ca'm as a millpond. Things air, apearently, so peaceful in Chinkville at this minute that you'd believe all the tong gun men was on a vacation. But let me tell you that less than two days ago, to my own knowin', nighabout a dozen Chinamen was killed in some of them underground rooms. I seen 'em myself as they lay dead. Yit there ain't been a single chink funeral; and if you ask a Chinaman about it, he'll swear by all the high gods of China that he ain't never heard of any such fight. How does that hit ye?"

"It's very peculiar, to say the least!"

Jameson looked at him through the smoke of his cigar.

"Well, I should say!"

"As you're familiar with the situation," said Lawson, "what would be your advice as to how I'm to proceed to get at the bottom facts here?"

Jameson took out his cigar and looked the insurance detective over carefully.

"You want my honest opinion, I reckon?"

"Sure!" was the answer.

"Then, I'm saying to you that the best thing fer you to do is to pack your grip and hit it back to the place you come from?"

"And not do anything?"

"That's my say."

"But I've been sent here to get at the truth of the matter!"

"I reckon."

"And you advise me not to do anything!"

"You'll live longer," Jameson declared.

He lifted his feet off the window ledge and brought them with a thump to the floor.

"Let me norate to you a few facts that has come under my pers'nal observation sense things has got to hummin' this way down in them chink latitudes. First off, Buffalo Bill and his pards comes here, sent to look into what's happened to Matt Nightingale, him bein' a cattleman, who is all the time supposed to be close-herdin' about his home range.

"Buffalo Bill, like his custom is, jumps into the game plum greedy to do things. In addition to bein' detailed to look into what's befallen the said cattleman, he has become pers'nally interested in seein' what's occurred to a certain young ombray and his girl; the young ombray bein' Brodie Towne, who has been hittin' the pipe hard in these here chink joints, and the girl bein' a missionary to the chinks. Cody has seen 'em enter by way of Moy Wing's restaurant; and they don't come out ag'in.

"Tharfore, Cody and his pards butts into the game straight off. And the times they has gittin' out, after onct they had got in, is enough to give 'em brain fag.

"Brodie Towne himself, the chinks has tried to feed to the rats of the underground river; but, bein' a plucky boy, Brodie gives the ravenous rats the 'Ha, ha!' and gits out. Brodie's girl, this Miss Kelso I mentioned, is held by a chink who has took a notion to make her his wife.

"As if all them exciting circumstances ain't enough, Wild Bill is captured and held by the chink thugs, who air goin' to kill him; and his pards, old Nomad and Baron Schnitzenhauser, who air tryin' to locate him, air trapped by a wizard umbrella that drops down on them, and finds themselves prisoners alongside of Wild Bill.

"I reckon all three would have gone under, too, if it hadn't been fer another chink what was sent hyer by the chief of police of 'Frisco to help Buffalo Bill in his Chinytown fight. This chink, which his name is Sam Wah, finds out where the pris'ners air held, and comes and tells of it.

"Tharfore, Cody and me sets out with him; and after adventures dangerous and numerous enough to curl our hair we gits to 'em. We finds, too, Brodie Towne and the young woman—they bein' ag'in in the hands of the chinks—and the whole of us gits out at last. Likewise, we arrests some of the chinks. They're in jail now!"

"But you didn't see anything, or hear anything, of Bent Murdock?"

"Not a thing," said Jameson. "So I opines he's dead, and that yer old insurance company is goin' to have to hand over the money to his widder and the creditors. And seems to me you ought to do it. That's what insurance is for, ain't it?"

"We expect to make the payment if he is dead."

"You don't believe he is?"

"We want the proof first."

"I reckon that's natural," Jameson admitted. "How you're goin' to git it, though, I don't know."

"I was figuring to get help from you; or information, at any rate."

"You've got me pumped dry, Mr. Lawson."

"What is Buffalo Bill doing now?" asked Lawson.

"I reckon you may say he's restin' on his laurels."

"Why, he hasn't accomplished anything!"

Jameson sat up straight, boiling with indignation.

"Wow! He ain't?"

"Not as I see it."

"Then your eyes, er somethin', is shore failin' you."

"What has he done?"

"Jest what he set out to do. He was sent hyer to see what had become of Matt Nightingale, the elusive cattleman aforesaid, which I was tellin' you about. Matt's friends thought he was dead; or, at any rate, Matt's brother, who is an officer at Fort Union, shore thought that. Cody was to see. As the upshot of his investigations, taken at the risks I was noratin' about, Cody finds that Matt Nightingale is plum a sweet song-bird, of a kind that nobody had guessed. He had swindled his partner and jumped out with a lot of money. Thinkin' he would be pursued, he had hid in Chinytown, him bein' a former friend of Moy Wing, what runs the chop-suey house. I reckon he pays Moy Wing to hide him down in them Chinytown ratholes. But Cody smells him out and the mystery is ended."

"But he didn't find Bent Murdock!"

"That wasn't Cody's work; he was only lookin' fer Murdock as a sort o' side issue, while he was helpin' to git Towne and this girl out of the hands of the chinks and find the cattleman.

"You see," the marshal went on, explaining and defending, "Cody is workin' for the government—specially the army part of it, his chief duties bein' to do scout work when the reds air troublesome, and to put a quietus on the outlaws and gun men that air from time to time makin' trouble along the border. He was sent hyer by the army officers, at the instigation of this officer at Fort Union, to find Matt Nightingale. He found him! By now Matt's brother wishes that Cody hadn't been so industrious and keen-nosed, I reckon; for Matt is a Nightingale roostin' in jail, and will go over the road. So that's the end of Cody's task hyer. And, as I said, not havin' anything extry on his hands, jest now he is restin' on his laurels; which is to say, he's takin' his ease at ther best hotel in Cyanide, smokin' good see-gyars, and conductin' himself, fer a little while, like a giniwine son of rest. Likewise, his pards air doin' the same."

Lawson, insurance detective, who had been mightily interested, asked another question:

"Could I get his aid in this matter, do you think? I'd like to see him."

"I don't reckon you could," Jameson answered, smoking up again. "Not unless he was made to see that it was his duty, er that human life was at stake, er the like o' that. It's this way, you see: If Cody should pick up every case that is brought to his attention, or which he is asked to dig into, he'd be turnin' hisself into a perpetual-motion machine, he is that successful and

popular. So I figger that he's likely to rest and git his wind ag'in, ag'in the time, which may come at any minute, when the army men will fire him like a shot out of a cannon at suthin' else."

Sam Lawson sat in thought a minute; while the marshal, his chair tipped back, blew rings of smoke at the ceiling of his office.

"Just go over what you told me about that umbrella trick again," said Lawson.

Jameson turned to him.

"Well, it was a trick that nobody but a chink would ever thought about—a sort of man trap, shaped like a big umbrella, workin' up and down through a hole in the ceilin', makin' of it a sort of elevator. Never seen anything like it."

"It's there yet?"

"It is, if the chinks ain't taken it away; which is likely, now that we're onto it."

"Could you show it to me?"

Jameson stared at the little man.

"Y' wouldn't think o' tryin' et?"

"I might."

"I'd advise ye not to. So I reckon I'd better not tell ye where it is."

"In one of the cellars, you said."

"There's a good many o' them; more'n anybody knows about, in my opinion."

"Well, I'd like to see it. I ain't saying I'd try to use it; that would be a risky thing, I s'pose, for me to do?"

"It would."

The little man fell silent again.

"I guess I'll ask you to show it to me, anyhow; because, for one thing, I want to get them cellars located. It's up to me to find out if Bent Murdock is living or dead. The insurance company sent me here to do that, and I'm going to do it."

His manner was so nervously commanding that the marshal pulled himself out of his easy-chair by the window.

"I kin show you where it is," he admitted, "if the chinks ain't plum stopped up the door in the wall which leads into the cellar. I'm half thinking that maybe they have. But I'll show you."

They left the office together and took their way to the narrow alley that lay at one side of Moy Wing's chop-suey house, which was to be reached from the main street.

"Nobody much but chinks ever passes through this alley, day or night," said the marshal; "and lately I've noticed that even they fight shy of it."

There were a few Chinamen on the street, but none in the little alley, which was quite deserted.

"Right there is the box which they keep settin' ag'in the wall to hide the door," announced Jameson. "Seems jest set there by accident, that box does, as ye may say."

"Yes, it looks that way."

Stepping up to the box, Jameson pulled it aside.

What they saw was a hole, made by the removal of two or three bricks in the wall of the house, which flushed sharp against the sidewalk.

Jameson stuck the toe of his shoe into the hole, kicked sharply, and a little door was driven open, inward, by the blow of his kick.

This revealed a small, square door, yet large enough to admit a man easily. Beyond the door everything was dark, even when the insurance detective dropped down on his knees and tried to see in.

"Back there is the cellar," Jameson explained. "There's two more connected with it. Then another one, that's underneath. And still some more overhead. Only them that's overhead, I reckon, you wouldn't call cellars, as they're above ground; they're rooms and corridors, and sech like, on the ground floor of the buildin'. This house is two stories, ye see; the other houses jammin' up ag'in it air of the same height. Under all of 'em air cellars; and the chinks lives and hides in the cellars as much as they do in the houses."

"I think I'd like to take a look in here," said Lawson.

"Ye can, if ye want to. Ain't nobody to say otherwise. Unless," he added, "the chinks should take a hand at keepin' ye out."

"Back in there somewhere is where all the wonderful things you've been telling me happened?"

"Yes; and on the floors and in the rooms above."

"And the underground river you spoke of is back in there?"

"'Tain't exactly a river," Jameson amended; "it's jest a canal, as ye may say, plugged out underground by the mine and reduction works company, to carry off the water from the mine and the reduction waste. See? It comes out into the gorge that's below the town."

"I guess I'll crawl in and look round a bit."

"Better take a lantern with ye; things air plum blacker than a pocket without a light."

Lawson went back with Jameson to get a lantern, after they had pushed the box into position again to hide the hole.

"You're runnin' this resk ag'in my judgment," said Jameson. "If I had time I'd go with you, jest to see that you keep safe; but you're an experienced man, you tell me, and know how to look out fer yerself. You'll need your wits about you if so be the chinks takes a notion to make you trouble."

"I don't really think they will bother me," Lawson declared.

"You say that because you're that ignorant of the possibilities that you ain't met up with."

"You don't think you want to try it with me?"

The insurance detective had got his lantern and was ready to return to the alley.

"I don't," said Jameson. "I've had enough experience in there to do me fer one while."

"Good-by, then!"

Lawson turned away toward the alley.

"How long before I shall begin the work?" Jameson asked, in a casual tone.

"What work?" said Lawson, stopping.

"The work of rescuin' you?"

"Now you're joking!"

"Am I? I'm hopin' it will turn out a joke, that's all."

"You won't go with me?"

"Not any."

"Good-by, then. You'll see me inside of an hour."

"Livin', or the other way?" said Jameson.

But Lawson trotted off, swinging the lantern, and soon vanished from the street into the little alley.

CHAPTER II.

SAM LAWSON'S MARVELOUS STORY.

It was late afternoon when the marshal took his way in the direction of the Cyanide Hotel, where Buffalo Bill and his pards were stopping while in the town. He had seen nothing more of the insurance detective who had given his name as Sam Lawson; but waiting at his office for word from Lawson had made him late. He had expected to call on the noted scout at a time much earlier.

His surprise was great, therefore, when, passing the mouth of the little alley leading into Chinatown and glancing curiously into it, he saw Lawson swaying about in there as if he were intoxicated.

Jameson stopped and turned into the alley.

"Hello!" he said, approaching Lawson.

The insurance agent was now standing in the middle of the alley, swinging backward and forward on his heels, his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Occasionally he muttered some indistinguishable word. His appearance was that of a man intoxicated, and that was Jameson's first impression on beholding him at close quarters.

"Hello!" he repeated, when Lawson did not respond to his greeting.

The insurance detective stopped teetering and stared at his accoster.

"Who're you?" came the thick question.

"I'm Jameson, marshal of this hyer hamlet. What's happened to ye?"

"Oh! You're Jameson!"

The insurance detective passed a hand before his face, as if "batting" at a mosquito.

"So you're—you're Jameson? Tha—that's clear enough! But—what I want to know is, who'm I?"

"Why, you're Lawson! What's the matter with you? Been drinkin', or hittin' the opium pipe in that joint back there?"

He took Lawson by the arm.

"Say," said Lawson thickly, like a drunken man—"you're Jameson? That's all right. Question is, who'm I?"

"I've told you—you're Sam Lawson, the feller that has come hyer to look into this insurance case of Bent Murdock, because your company ain't goin' to pay the money until they know fer sure that Murdock has gone under. That's what you told me."

"I did?"

"You sure did. I reckon you've been drinkin'."

"No-p; so 'lp me, ain't had a drop o' nothin'. 'Twas the chinks."

"Wha-at?"

"The chinks done it."

"What did they do to ye?"

"I dunno—can't 'member; I knowed a while ago and forgot."

"Wow!" breathed Jameson. "More black works of the chinks o' Chinytown. I reckon this hyer is a case fer Buffalo Bill to look into, as I'm jedgin' it's too much fer me."

He said to Lawson:

"You jest come go 'long with me and I'll see that you're took care of. Was you goin' to your hotel?"

"D-don't know where I was goin'. Do-don't know

where I am. I'm f-fogged. So you're Jameson? 'Portant question is, who'm I?"

He swayed tipsily, and might have fallen to the ground but for the sustaining arm of the marshal.

"You come along with me," urged Jameson. "If you need treatment you can have it. I'll summon a doctor. But first off I want you to see some men that will be mightily int'rested in this."

Lawson, lacking any will of his own, permitted Jameson to lead him away.

As they went up the street, the insurance detective leaning heavily on the arm of the marshal, and now and then mumbling, all who saw them thought that Lawson was a man under arrest for intoxication.

Within ten minutes or so Jameson had arrived with Lawson at the scout's hotel, and stood before the door of Cody's room, on which he knocked.

The deep voice of Buffalo Bill bade him enter.

When he pushed open the door, which stood half ajar, the Cyanide marshal found the scout and his pards in various easy attitudes, taking their comfort.

But Buffalo Bill came at once to his feet when he saw Jameson and the man he had brought.

"Feller hurt?" sang out Nick Nomad.

"Looks as if he'd been smellin' the strong water," suggested Wild Bill.

"He says he ain't drunk," Jameson announced, "but that the chinks has been at him."

The scout pushed out a chair, and Jameson lowered the nearly helpless man into it. By this time all the occupants of the room had come to their feet and were asking questions.

Buffalo Bill bent over Lawson, felt his pulse, and made a hasty examination.

"Not intoxication," he announced; "so it looks as if it may be true that the Chinese have been at him. Bring me some cold water and a sponge, Nomad."

Jameson was already explaining:

"Name's Sam Lawson; and he told me that he was an insurance detective, sent hyer by the company to look into this case of Bent Murdock, as the insurance people air goin' to refuse payment until they know fer sure that Murdock has gone under. I was tellin' him all about the things that has lately happened in Chinytown, it comin' up through the suggestion that maybe Murdock had been robbed and murdered by them; then this feller gits crazy to take a look at that door in the alley and a peek into them cellars. I advised him that it was plum too dangerous; but he would try it. That was five hours ago. Jest now, in comin' by the alley, I found him moseyin' round in it, actin' like a drunk man. But he says thet it's chinks. So I headed him fer hyer; and now you see him."

Buffalo Bill began work with the sponge and the cold water. In washing Lawson's head he found a lump half the size of a hen's egg.

"It looks as if he had been hit," he said. "A blow right there would make him dizzy, all right. So that may be just what is the matter with him. Give me that pocket flask, Hickok."

He was brought the flask and a spoon, and gave Lawson some whisky.

They continued the cold-water treatment, with a little stimulant at intervals, having placed Lawson on a lounge. They did not think it necessary to send for a

physician, not knowing but that what Lawson might relate would be better told with no physician present. Lawson was still lying on the lounge when he came back to a full realization of things and showed a disposition to speak of what had befallen him.

"This is Buffalo Bill, that I was tellin' you about," said Jameson to him; "and hyer air his pards—Wild Bill Hickok, Nick Nomad, and Baron von Schnitzenhauser, which we calls Schnitz fer short. They're all interested in chink doin's, and closer than oysters when it comes to clingin' onto secrets that hadn't ought to be told. So you can say to 'em whatever."

"I wish I had had 'em with me," said Lawson, in a weak voice at first.

"I could 'a' told you that, and maybe did, before ye set out," said Jameson. "The chinks clipped you on the head, I reckon?"

"Yes; when I was fighting 'em."

"Wow! You was fightin' 'em?"

"More than a dozen of 'em," said Lawson. "They come at me, you see, when I was tryin' to get the chain off the leg of Bent Murdock, and——"

"What's that?" yelled Jameson.

"That's what I said."

"Then Bent Murdock's livin'?"

"He was then; but what's happened since I don't know. I think he's alive, though, and he is kept chained in that room."

The statements of Sam Lawson were as interesting and startling to the scout and his friends as to Jameson.

He began to question Lawson, asking him for particulars; which brought the insurance detective down to concrete statements.

"Well, Jameson knows," he said, "that I went into that cellar. He had told me about that umbrella, which caught a man up into the room over it, and I searched for that first thing."

"Likely 'twarn't thar," said Nomad.

"Yes, it was there. And while I was studying it, wondering how I could use it without getting caught, some Chinamen came. I heard them walking on the floor above; then the umbrella dropped down. Before that happened I had put my light out and had got back behind one of the empty tea chests."

Lawson's story was awakening a lively interest. He leaned back against the wall, a dark-haired, dark-eyed little man, smooth-faced and young-looking. His clothing was as unostentatious as himself, being merely a dark business suit, while the hat he wore was unpretentious. There was nothing of glitter or vanity about the man. In that respect he impressed Buffalo Bill favorably.

"Two men were dropped out on the cellar floor by the umbrella," he went on. "I couldn't have seen them; of course, if they hadn't carried a light—a queer, paper lantern, with a candle burning in it. They went out of the cellar by the passage leading into the other one and disappeared."

He stopped and passed his hand across his face again, as if wiping away something that obstructed his sight.

"My head still feels queer, gentlemen," he explained. "But I suppose I'll be all right by and by. But it's this story I want to tell you, not anything about my condition. I was wondering whether I couldn't work that umbrella so as to have myself hoisted to the floor above,

but didn't know how to go about it; when one of the Chinese came running back.

"He carried the lantern and he set it on the floor. I judged he had seen the other Chinaman to the door leading into the alley and then had returned. I thought he meant probably to make a search of the cellar, in which case I saw that I was in for a fight; but he didn't. He left the lantern on the floor; then jerked a string that hung down outside the umbrella and crawled under."

"In another instant it was rising, crumpling together so that I didn't see him again, and took him up through a hole in the ceiling. You may believe that was an interesting sight to me."

"Well, I reckon!" said Jameson, breathing hard. "It's about the way, though, that the thing worked when we seen it."

"The umbrella came right down again," said the little detective; "and I knew that it had been lowered for the other Chinaman. Which proved to me that he was expected to return to the cellar soon."

He stopped again, being still weak.

"I know I'm mighty reckless at times," he admitted, "and it was a reckless idea that captured me right then. It occurred to me to take the place of the Chinaman that was expected, and so get up where I wanted to go."

"Waugh!" rumbled Nomad. "Thar's little peek holes in the ceilin', an' they could see ye ef they looked."

"Well, that is what I did. I didn't know about the holes. I pulled the cord, as I had seen the Chinaman do. I had both lanterns with me—my own and the Chinese lantern; and both were now lighted, for I had attended to that. So, as I was saying, I pulled the cord and got into the umbrella, as the Chinaman did; and the next moment I was being hoisted."

"It was pretty close quarters in that umbrella, for you know how it clamps tight together—shuts up; but I shifted the lanterns to my left hand and got out my revolver. By that time the umbrella had passed through the trapdoor and the trapdoor had dropped back into place; after which the umbrella opened its bamboo framework and shed me out onto the floor."

"Of course the chinks who were up there and working the apparatus saw me at once, and knew that I wasn't the fellow they were looking for. But the surprise rattled them. That gave me time to get to my feet and make a dive to put distance between me and them."

"Dot iss der kind uff a excitementds dot vouldt suidt Schnitzenhauser!" shouted the baron. "Py shinks, I am vishin' idt hadt peen me."

"The chinks jumped fer ye," said Nomad, his mouth open, his eyes twinkling.

"I didn't know where to go, of course," said Lawson. "So I took the first passage I saw."

"Lucky if you didn't slam right into a door!" said Jameson.

"I got ten yards or more, I suppose, before the Chinamen could get their wits together and set out to chase me. They yelled as they came for me, probably to summon assistance. But I was going some right then; and I went straight on."

"I dropped the chink lantern, but clung to my own, and clung to my revolver. I was a fool, of course."

Lawson stopped again. He was breathing heavily; it

overexcited him to relive those sensational and dangerous moments.

"But a fool for luck!" he went on. "You know how it is. If I hadn't been a fool I wouldn't have got in there in that manner; and if I hadn't been dead lucky I'd never got out."

"Waugh!" Nomad rumbled, bending forward as if that would help him to hear better.

"I didn't know where I was, and I didn't know where I was going; but I do know that I heard the chinks hot after me as I scuttled along. Then I butted into a little room all filled with red velvet curtains and the like, with a big black monster, shaped like a man, right in the middle of it."

"Ther Chinese joss!" said Nomad. "Must er been."

"Probably that's what it was—the Chinese joss. If so, I had blundered into the joss house. Well, I didn't see any way out, so I dived behind one of the curtains, which put me right in front of the black image. I gripped my revolver nervously, for I didn't know but that soon I would have the biggest fight of my life, and would see my finish.

"But even then, I give you my word if it didn't give me the creeps, just to look up into the ugly face of that joss. The eyes glared at me; and then I saw the eyes move."

"Wow!"

"That's what I thought—wow! It gave me the creeps. Then I saw that they were human eyes, looking out through the eyes of the image. And if they were human eyes, then I knew a man was in there. That gave me an idea, as desperate as that first one which decided me to try the umbrella. If the man got in there he did it by a hole, or a gate, or a door, or something like it; I knew that.

"I thought I heard the feet of the chinks that were chasing me; and it occurred to me that I must have made pretty hot time to have left them so far behind. Then I began to crawl round the joss, hunting for the door by which the fellow had got into the inside of the thing. I suppose now that he was a priest, or some sort of spiritual caretaker; but just then I didn't know or care what he was; I was resolved that if I could get hold of him I would yank him out and take his place.

"Perhaps he understood what I was thinking; or else he heard the pursuers coming. Anyway, he did the thing I would have asked him to do, if I'd known how and supposed he would do it. He opened a little door near the bottom of the image—a door that was all covered over with red velvet hangings; and then he tried to get out.

"But I nailed him and hammered him on the head with my revolver. He sank down as limp as the velvet curtain."

"Waugh!" Nomad breathed again.

"By this time the men that had followed me were right there. I didn't have time to think further, but jerked myself under those velvet hangings, keeping the fellow with me that I had knocked out. I also had sense enough to douse my glim, and do it quick. It was behind the curtains, and in the lower part of the joss, when the pursuers dashed into the room.

"I heard them looking round and hunting for me; heard them pushing the curtains about. But I noticed one thing: that they didn't come close up to the image.

I suppose now they were afraid to, because of superstition or a religious feeling. You can bet I was glad that they didn't!

"Setting down my lantern, I put my fingers on the throat of the unconscious rascal I had in there, prepared to do the choking act if he came enough to himself to try to set up a holler. But as he was still limp as a rag I, after a moment or so, let him lie on the floor.

"The fellows were still hunting round. Apparently they thought I ought to be in there or that they had passed me somewhere, which last probably didn't seem likely. Another thought came to me—that they didn't know that the image was hollow and had a door leading into it, hid under one of the red velvet curtains. It's my opinion that the fellow you think was a priest, seeing I was a white man, and that I had spotted his moving eyes, got the idea into his head that I would come in there and murder him; so that is why he tried to get out. Probably he would have stayed right there if I had been a Chinaman."

"Them priests is plum deceivin' critters!" Nomad avowed.

"I think you're right there," said Lawson. Then he went on:

"Inside the image was a small ladder, and when the fellows still hunted round, making a lot of noise, I climbed up that short ladder, and found myself right behind the eyes of the image, so that I could look out through the holes the other fellow had looked out of. I saw the chinks rummaging round, searching for me—six of them, all chattering in whispers, and giving glances now and then at the big black image, as if they were not sure but it would jump at them. But they didn't come close to it.

"This is all right," I thought. "I'm safe, unless one of the priests comes." I admit I didn't just think the word priest at the time, for I didn't guess what the big image was; but I felt sure that the man I had knocked out had friends who knew the secret of that place as well as he did; and it was them I was afraid of.

"So I climbed down the little ladder and squatted by the senseless Chinaman, again ready to choke him if he stirred.

"By and by I heard the searchers leave the room; they had given it up. But to make sure I kept still a while; then I climbed up to the eyes again and looked round. They were gone.

"After that I climbed down and lighted my lantern. The joss was big enough inside to accommodate three or four men easily, and was tall in proportion. I think the thing must have been made of brass plates, for I thought I saw the heads of rivets that had been gilded over with paint.

"But the thing that caught my eyes—knocked me silly—was that in there was a little cabinet, or chest of drawers, all filled with gold money. And though I'm no thief, gentlemen, the temptation to swipe some of that gold came to me pretty strong."

"I t'ink I shouldt haf done it," declared the German. "Idt hadt been stolen by dhem, I pedt you!"

"I didn't know about that. Perhaps it was the offering to the temple, as seems to me now, since your suggestion. Still, I might have filled my pockets with it;

but just then the chink I had hammered on the head showed signs of coming back to life.

"I didn't want to hammer him again, for I might have killed him. So I concluded to get out of there while I could. And I had no reason to stay in there, since the Chinese who had chased me were gone. What I wanted to do was to poke round and see if I could find out anything about Bent Murdock, and then get out as quick as I could.

"I dropped one of the gold pieces into my pocket, just to be able to show it, as proof, maybe, of my story; and pulled my freight away from that place while the fellow was rolling and muttering himself back to consciousness.

"When I got out, and had left the room, I found myself in the same passage I had been in; but I saw that there were others, several others—each of them leading up to that room.

"As there wasn't much choice, I struck into one, because I didn't want to go back the way I had come, and perhaps meet the Chinese. So I swung along again, not knowing where I was going. But I tried to keep track of the direction; for I felt sure I should want to go back that way as soon as I could.

"After a while I heard Chinese. The galleries were mere tunnels, at times; and there were small rooms. Most of them showed that recently they had been occupied. It was like going into a house that had been deserted, as I did once, where a fire had scared the people out, and they had fled and left their beds and clothing and everything behind. It was just the same."

"I think we can explain that," said the scout.

"Then I wish you would," Lawson told him.

"There has been a merry chink war going on down there for some days and nights. The Hep Sing Tong men have been fighting the On Leon Tong men. There have been some bloody times, and a number of Chinamen have been killed. Those occupying those rooms probably got scared and cleared out in a great hurry to save their lives."

"I was tellin' you something about that," Jameson reminded.

"I recollect now that you did," Lawson admitted.

"Go on!" the scout urged. "We're anxious to hear about Bent Murdock."

"Oh, yes! Well, I heard a sound by and by which led me to a small hole of a room, like an open prison cell, where I found Murdock chained by one of his legs to the floor, surrounded by filth and dirt.

"The fellow was nearly insane, and his wild mutterings are what guided me. I had a talk with him—just a few words, while I was trying to get the chain off his legs or loose it from the floor. But I didn't get his whole story. But from what he said I think he was taking some money home from the bank, after the failure, or because he expected it to fail; and was set on by Chinese thieves, who not only robbed him, but had brought him to that place, where he had been chained and held ever since.

"I was doing everything I could for him, which was just nothing at all, when some Chinamen came rushing suddenly on me. They had been drawn by the light of my lantern, which I had neglected to put out.

"When they saw me they came for me, howling. Some were armed with swords, others with knives. I

knew I had to move at once. So I jumped to get out; but ran into a club, or something, which cracked me on the head. I remember that I smashed the fellow who did it with my lantern, crushing it over his head. After that I hardly know what happened to me, except that I ran.

"It seems to me that I ran miles; but of course that was only a delusion, due to my condition. I was crazy from that crack on the head. I remember dimly that I tried to find my way back to the umbrella room. Whether I did or not I don't know; I guess I couldn't have done that. For, by and by, I struck up against a door; and, when I rammed hard on it, it let me out of the house.

"Though I was outside, I hurried on, for it seemed to me I still heard the Chinamen hot after me. I must have found my way to that alley, or else I came out into it. I can't say as to that, gentlemen. All I know is that I have just the faintest remembrance, like a dream, that Jameson came to me and told me who he was; and that I was bewildered as to who I was and where I was.

"He said he would take me to a doctor, I think; or perhaps his statement was that he would bring me here. I really don't know. But that's all. Only——"

He paused. He had talked himself into a condition of feverish excitement.

"Only," he repeated, "I want to thank you for what you have done to help me, and for the interest with which you have listened to this overlong story."

"Interest!" cried the man from Laramie. "Overlong story! I'm betting none of us here has listened to a more interesting yarn, or one that's more important, since a good while."

"That's right!" Buffalo Bill agreed. "It tells us where Bent Murdock is, too."

"Whar he was, yer means," Nomad corrected.

"It tells us that he is alive, which is the most important thing; and where we are to look to find him."

"I reckon, Cody," remarked the man from Laramie, "that the chances are big that he won't be where he was when Lawson saw him, even if we could find the place."

"I admit freely," said Lawson, "that even if I was inside those rooms I couldn't lead you to that joss room, nor to the point where I found Murdock."

"Yet I reckon you could make a mighty good sashay at hittin' the spot," said Jameson.

Lawson took out the piece of gold he had taken from the store inside the joss and showed it to them.

"Chink money!" said Jameson. "I never seen none like it."

"Chink money is generally silver," remarked the scout. "Yet this seems to have the Chinese look."

He hefted it.

"Has the feeling of gold," he said.

"Aber I ain't anxious to play der thief," remarked the baron, "I am acknowledging dot I wouldt like to haf some of dose moneys minesellef."

"Thar must be a lively time goin' on in Chinkville now sense your advent inter et, Lawson," declared Nomad. "You talk et over wi' ther boyees while I take a turn down in the street."

Then he arose quickly and went out.

CHAPTER III.

SAM WAH.

Buffalo Bill gave the old trapper a quick and comprehensive glance as the latter passed out of the room; then he returned to the subject of the conversation. He knew Nomad had heard a suspicious sound outside.

Jameson was anxious to "hit" the chink colony at once, before the Chinese had time to gather their wits and get in readiness for it.

"They'll be expectin' a raid," he urged. "As a friend o' Bent Murdock, I'm uncommon concerned about him."

He looked at the scout.

"Cody, of course, ain't in the game," he said, "yit I'd like his help."

"You can have it, old man," the scout told him. "The fact that Murdock is held a prisoner, chained by the leg in those foul dens, is all the warrant that my pards and I want."

"Well, it's good o' ye, Cody. I reckon Mr. Lawson there will be wishin' strong, too, that we kin resurrect Murdock; fer if we git him out alive then this old insurance company won't have to pay fer him bein' dead. But what I'm thinkin' about most is Murdock himself and his fambly. He's a fine man, and has got a fine fambly; and it hurt me like time to have people hintin' round that he had gone crooked with the bank money and skun out."

While they were talking, deciding that the time to begin was at once, Buffalo Bill still showed no desire to get into immediate action. He began to ask Lawson questions again, thus prolonging the interview.

Lawson was rapidly regaining his normal condition; and though he said his head thumped like a drum, he yet declared that he was able and anxious to take part in the proposed effort to release Bent Murdock.

Suddenly footsteps and the sounds of a scuffle were heard in the hall beyond the door; then the door flew open, and Nick Nomad tumbled into the room, dragging a Chinaman by the queue.

"This hyar is plum what I went out fer," he bellowed. "I heard the rat-eater listenin' out thar, and set out to trap him. I made a pertense o' goin' down ther stairs ter the street, knowin' thet he had backed into some o' the rooms; but I didn't go furdur than enough to hide me. Thar I camped down; and when the chink came snoopin' back ter lissen ag'in I jumped out, and was on top o' him 'fore he could make his gitaway."

He flung the Chinaman to the floor in the middle of the room.

But the surprise given to the Chinaman was no greater than that given to the men in the room; for as soon as he scrambled up they saw that he was Sam Wah, the Hep Sing Tong man who had been sent on by the chief of police of San Francisco to aid Buffalo Bill in his fight against the thug Chinese of the town of Cyanide.

Nomad roared like an angry bear when he saw whom he had captured.

"What's et mean?" he demanded, in a tone like a buzz saw. "Looks so suspicious as to be plum scan'lous, ter me! When a man spies on his friends et smells crooked."

The startled and discomfited Chinaman stood trembling.

"Me allee samee make the sneak to listen," he urged. "Waal, I guess yes! I reckon you did. But what fer?"

"That's right, Sam Wah!" said the scout. "A quick explanation is in order."

All had gathered round the ruffled Chinaman; and, as they were much larger men, he looked small and cowed in their midst.

"Me makee the explain," he said, waving his hands. "No touchee pigtail any more and me makee the explain!"

"We're waitin' for it, chink," said Wild Bill. "Don't rust out our patience."

"Chief policee 'Flisco," said Sam Wah, "tell me always I shall know evel' thing what is going on. Savvee? He say, 'Not tlost anybody!' He say, 'Sometime man makee out he is your fliend when he nottee your fliend.' So I do. I am come top-side here to see the honorable Melican scout. I have a reportee that I must make. Savvee? So I hear many men talkee-talkee in the loom. So I listen; see what all the talkee-talkee is. Savvee? I think maybe I got enemies in the loom what talkee with the honorable scout."

"That is all right, Sam Wah," said the scout. "We will accept the explanation. Take a chair now and we'll all feel better."

He set the example by resuming his seat.

But Sam Wah, even when seated, surrounded by those Americans, did not seem at ease. He looked suspiciously at Lawson; and cast glances of dislike at old Nomad, who had laid sacrilegious hands on his pigtail. Besides the pain of it, that had been a deep indignity. He was disturbed, too, by the ease with which the old trapper had captured him; that ate into his pride, and he had a good deal of it, of a professional kind.

"What's your report?" the scout asked. "You said you had one."

"Too many Melican man here," said Sam Wah, voicing his objection bluntly. "Me no can talkee when so many Melican man have ear to listen."

"Oh, it's for me alone?"

"It pleasee me better."

"Then come out into the hall."

The scout stepped out into the hall and the Chinaman followed him.

"Look out fer tricks!" Nomad could not help flinging after them.

Buffalo Bill led the Chinaman to the farther end of the hall, where they were quite safe from being overheard.

"We can talk here, all right," he said.

Sam Wah looked round carefully, then opened his budget of information.

"You know On Leon Tong men?"

"The Chinese of this place! The men we have had all our trouble with."

"And you know Hep Sing Tong men?"

"You, and the other Chinese that came with you from San Francisco. Yes; I've got that all straight."

"When we havee the fight in Chinytown," said Sam Wah, "you see the Chinees dead men—all plentee dead men!"

"I saw that; and it wasn't a pleasant sight."

"Thlee of them Chinees dead men are Hep Sing Tong."

"Three were your friends from 'Frisco."

"Allee same true. So me sendee 'Flisco, gittee plentee more Hep Sing Tong fightee men. Now we are to makee the kill."

Buffalo Bill made Sam Wah return to the room and repeat this, as he wanted the others to hear it.

"Waugh!" bellowed Nomad. "Ye're goin' ter start up a murder mill o' yer own, eh?"

"We killee On Leon Tong men," said Sam Wah, not at all disturbed, except by the fear that if all these men knew it the thing might be stopped. He seemed to think it was the proper thing to do, that he might get "even" for his comrades who had fallen in the bloody tong war. "We makee hot time."

"Wow! Waugh! Waal, ain't thet ther plum limit?" Nomad demanded.

"Go on," said Buffalo Bill to the Chinaman. "What else? We will hear all of it."

"Thattee all," Sam Wah answered.

"I reckon it's enough!" said Jameson. "When is this hyer killin' to take place?"

"Light away," Sam Wah admitted.

"Then, I reckon, in the int'rest o' peace an' decency, I'll have to take charge o' you, and prevent it."

Sam Wah looked scared.

"You stoppee me, hey?" he cried.

"I reckon it's my duty, as marshal o' this camp."

Sam Wah backed toward the door and laid a hand on the knob.

"I reckon you'd best stand off from that door," warned the marshal. "You ain't goin' out till I say you may."

He drew his revolver.

"No shootee!" gasped Sam Wah.

"I want to ask you a few more questions, Sam Wah," said the scout. "Remember that I'm your friend."

"You my fliend, hey?" Sam Wah shot at him.

"Yes, I'm your friend," the scout answered.

"Me been sent here by chief policee 'Flisco to helpee you! You savvee that!"

"That's right."

"You no lettee that man shootee me, hey?"

"I don't think he will unless you give him plenty cause. What I want to say is: Do you know where Bent Murdock is?"

"Me no savvee Muldock."

"The white man I've told you about, that is missing; the man we thought might be a prisoner of these Cyanide Chinamen. We discovered that he is really held a prisoner by them. Think now! Could you guide us to where he is held?"

"Me no savvee Muldock," Sam Wah repeated.

"Then you can't help us in that, of course; that is, unless you would undertake to guide us again through those underground rooms. You did that once, to our entire satisfaction, and I know you could again. That's what we would like you to do."

Sam Wah, looking from Jameson to Nomad and back again—he seemed to consider the two men his enemies—seemed scarcely to hear the scout.

"This man"—the scout indicated Sam Lawson—"went into those rooms not long ago, by using the big umbrella. He found Murdock chained in a little room. But he couldn't free him. Then the Chinamen in there—the On Leon Tong men—came on him, and he had to run for his life; and had a hard time getting out."

Sam Wah was still letting his black eyes rove from Nomad to Jameson and back.

"You hear me?" asked the scout.

"Velly well."

"Well, what do you say?"

"Talk up, chink," Jameson commanded.

The answer to this was disconcerting. Quick as a flash Sam Wah's right foot came up and shot its slipper into Jameson's face, momentarily blinding him; so that, if he had wished, he could not have used his revolver. Equally quick was the jump that the Chinaman gave, as he drew open the door and hurled his blue-bloused form out into the hall. He threw the door shut with a bang as he made his exit; and they heard his feet softly pattering through the hall.

Jameson roared his anger and Nomad flung himself at the door.

But by the time the trapper got out into the hall Sam Wah had disappeared.

The other occupants of the room followed Nomad through the door, Jameson bellowing his anger and swinging his revolver; he was, at the same time, with his free hand, digging at one of his eyes.

"Where's the chink that done it?" he howled. "I'll shoot the rat-eater full of holes!"

But the offending chink was not to be found. Apparently he had gained the street and got away.

Sam Lawson was the first to return to the room. He had not moved farther than just beyond the door, as he still felt weak and was troubled with dizziness. Then the others came streaming in; Nomad and Jameson the last to give over the search.

"Wow!" gasped Jameson, as he dropped into a chair and dug again at his eye.

He saw Sam Wah's slipper on the floor and gave it an angry kick.

"To have an eye put out is enough, without it bein' done by a filthy chink slipper!"

He purpled and glared when he heard the light laugh of the man from Laramie.

"You didn't expect the chink to surrender kindly and let you lead him off to jail, I hope?" said Wild Bill, in explanation of his laugh. "It wouldn't be chink nature, nor human nature. You gave him to understand that you meant to stow him in jail to prevent this threatened tong war; and of course he wasn't goin' to stand it. Can't say that I blame him for anything but that lick he gave you with the slipper."

"Budt uff he hadn't done dot, how vouldt he haf got oudt?" asked the baron, who also seemed to sympathize with Sam Wah. "You see how idt iss," he went on, explaining. "Vildt Pill unt me, ve ton'dt forgidt dot uff idt vosn't for dot chink ve vould be rightd apoudt now roosdtng der cemidery in; unt ve ain'dt readty vor dot yidt. I ain'dt, eenyhow!"

"Right-o!" Wild Bill assented. "Sam Wah done us a mighty good turn. And one good turn deserves another."

Nomad arose suddenly.

"Seems ter me I hear thet chink stirrin' round some-ere out thar," he declared. "Talk et over, while I looks round. I ain't fergittin' thet he done me a good turn, too; but—"

He drew the door open softly and slipped out into the hall.

"What about Bent Murdock?" asked Lawson, who had not lost sight of the main point. "I acknowledge that I'd like to see him rescued."

"So that your company wouldn't have to pay that money?" said Wild Bill, smiling and winking at the baron.

"Partly—perhaps principally; though they'd never pay it now, after I make a report that I have seen him alive. But I'd like to see him rescued from where he is; and I'm willing to take a few personal risks to bring it about."

"I think it would be well for you to stay under a doctor's care, while the rest of us make a hunt for Murdock," the scout told him.

"I don't bother the doctors when I don't have to; and I don't think right now I have to. So, if you've got a plan, and I can help in it, I'm ready for it."

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAPPER TRAPPED.

While Buffalo Bill and those with him were discussing ways and means, Brodie Towne came hurriedly into the hall and to the scout's room. Old Nomad was still poking round outside, looking for Sam Wah.

Towne's manner denoted that he had news he considered important. But before delivering it he glanced sharply at Sam Lawson.

Buffalo Bill gave them an introduction; and explained that Lawson had but recently made an escape from the underground rooms of Chinatown, where he had found Bent Murdock in chains.

Brodie's pale face took on an anxious look when he heard it. He was still making a manly fight to overcome the opium habit to which he had become addicted; yet the pallor had not left his face nor had the over-brightness gone out of his eyes.

"It's a bad outlook for Murdock," he said. "And worse now, because of the tong war that is surely coming. That's what I came to tell you about."

He hesitated, glancing again at Lawson.

"Mr. Lawson may know that I have been a good deal about Chinatown," he remarked; "altogether too much for my own best welfare. I used to visit the opium and fan-tan rooms a good deal that were run by Moy Wing; and, because of it, I made a few friends among the Chinamen. When I meet one of them the chances are that he will talk with me and usually let drop something that may be important."

With this explanation he turned back to Buffalo Bill and the latter's pards.

"I met one of the chinks who claims to be friendly," he said. "It was down near Moy Wing's. And I had a little talk with him. He says that it's known by the On Leon Tong men that a large number of Hep Sing Tongs have come on from San Francisco to make trouble with the On Leon Tong fellows for those killings a few nights ago. Moy Wing has got scared and closed up his restaurant; the laundries in Moy Wing's basement have closed; and there has been a big exodus of On Leon Tongs out of this camp."

"The more of 'em that goes, and the faster, the better I'm pleased," Jameson grunted. "It's makin' me plum

white-headed, the worry of it!" He passed his fingers through his coal-black hair.

"This Chinaman told me," Towne went on, "that it was Sam Wah who sent to 'Frisco for the Hep Sing Tong men. I thought you ought to know it if it's so. Sam Wah came here under instructions to work for you, so of course you have a right to give orders to him. And I thought likely you would want to order him back to San Francisco short off. My informant was sure that in the tong war which he says is coming Sam Wah will be the leader of the Hep Sing Tongs."

"That tallies with what Sam Wah said himself," was the comment of Wild Bill.

"You've seen him?" Brodie Towne asked, surprised.

"Nomad is out in the hall now, looking for him. He was here, and told us that the tong war was scheduled for an immediate performance; and when my fiery friend, the marshal here, tried to spoke it, Sam Wah slammed a slipper into his face and scooted."

Towne looked amazed.

Buffalo Bill explained more fully what had happened.

"Then I've got here too late to stop Sam Wah," said Towne. "But maybe you'll come upon him again."

"It seems to me, Cody," said Wild Bill, "that handling chinks is a good deal like handling giant powder. Useful, you see, if they don't explode on your hands; that is, those like Sam Wah are that way. I guess Nomad isn't making excessive headway out there."

Wild Bill glanced at the door; then rose and went out into the hall, to see what Nomad was doing.

Jameson rose, also.

"I think I'll pike along down by Moy Wing's and look round," he said.

This brought the others to their feet.

"We'll go along with you," Buffalo Bill told him. "Perhaps we can get some idea, in that way, of how we had better go at this thing. It's my opinion that by entering through Moy Wing's restaurant we'll do as well as if we try that cellar route."

"Them cellars," said Jameson, "air scan'lous full of danger."

"No way you go is likely to be found a flowery path of peace," Wild Bill told him.

"Dey are filled mit dangerousness, I know, but der cellar roudes for mine," chirped the baron.

"Danger never daunts our dear friend Schnitz!" said Wild Bill, with a laugh.

"Nodt uff idt haf excidementd mit idt," asserted the baron.

"Is there any kind of danger, baron, that is lacking in excitement?"

"Oh, yaw! Uff a pulledt hidts you, unt you ton'dt know idt has peen schoodted, or iss going to pe schoodted, unt you are kilt, dare iss no excidementd, untl afdher you are deadt; unt dhen you ton'dt knowed idt. Yaw!"

They were passing out into the hall.

"I ain'dt seeing noddings uff olt Nomat," said the baron.

"Hello, Nomad!" called the scout. "Where are you hanging up?"

But the trapper did not answer.

"Got on the trail of the chink he thought was still roosting round out here," averred Wild Bill, "and followed him; that's my guess."

"Then," said Jameson, "likely we'll find him somewhere down round Moy Wing's, or round Chinytown."

They tramped together down the stairs and out into the street in front of the Cyanide Hotel, a notable and conspicuous group, that drew all eyes.

"We'll jest take a look down by Moy's," said the marshal.

"I don't think Sam Wah would go there," urged Brodie Towne.

"Still, you can't tell," declared Wild Bill. "The ways of a chink are peculiar."

They saw very few Chinamen, even when they had reached the Chinatown streets. Now and then a pair of slant eyes peered at them from doorway or window, or slippered feet went scuffling through the dark alleys; but, as a rule, chinks of every variety were more noticeable by reason of their absence from their familiar haunts than otherwise.

"There seems to be a good-sized scare on," commented Wild Bill.

They looked into the dark doorways they passed, and into the alleys, that were almost as dark.

They were about to go on to Moy Wing's; but, in passing a narrow street, they heard a strange outcry in it. Though the central roar seemed hardly human—it bellowed so wildly—they yet recognized in it the voice of the trapper.

"Nomad!" cried Buffalo Bill; and turned into the narrow street at a run.

The thought of all was that in following Sam Wah Nomad had tumbled into trouble.

They beheld soon an astounding sight. A big net had been dropped from a window down on the old trapper, and was being hoisted by the Chinaman who had flung it out on him to the window over his head. The meshes of the net being large, the trapper had pushed his arms through the holes, and swung his big revolver, though the motion of the rising net made it impossible for him to use it.

Old Nomad, drawn upward in the Chinese net, howled like a trapped coyote.

Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, and the baron were in the forefront as they jumped to the aid of the imperiled man.

Buffalo Bill's reliable forty-five came out.

"Bang!"

A shot chipped the ledge of the window right under the noses of the chinks manipulating the net.

"Bang!" echoed the revolver of Wild Bill; and a Chinaman flung backward, evidently the recipient of the lead.

The chink heads vanished like magic from the window.

There had been a risk to Nomad in thus driving back the thugs who had trapped him—a risk that the net, in its tumble, if the thugs released it, would fall so heavily that he would receive broken bones.

But it did not come down at all. Some of the meshes had caught against projections of the wall; so that, when the Chinese abandoned it and fled, the net hung, suspending the howling trapper above the rough pavement.

It was a funny sight, though at the moment no one there was in a mental condition to enjoy it. Nomad howled and threw himself about; and the revolver going off in his hand, sent its lead into the wall, gouging a hole.

"Waugh! Er, waugh! Leggo—leggo; lemme out er this! Wow! I'll shoot ye so full o' holes thet yer hides will look like yaller muskeeter nettin'! Leggo of me, I say!"

He did not know yet that the Chinamen had abandoned their attempt to hoist him to the window; but the next moment he was made aware of it, as Buffalo Bill called up to him.

"You can't crawl out of that, I suppose?" the scout asked.

Old Nomad painfully worked himself into a position which enabled him to look down on the scout.

"Wow! Et's Buffler!"

"You can't free yourself?"

Nomad gave a flounce and a jump; which only succeeded in ramming his legs through holes in the netting.

"Waugh! I can't! Yer sees how et is! Whar'd ye come frum? An' who was doin' thet shootin'?"

"We started up that infernal music," Wild Bill told him. "If you can't get out you'll have to wait till we get a ladder."

Buffalo Bill turned to get a box that he saw not far off.

He called to the others to search for boxes.

The scurrying hunt that was made yielded a number. When these had been stacked up Buffalo Bill sprang to the top of them, and so was brought close enough to the trapper to be able to rip a hole in the net and get him out.

Nomad dropped to the ground, howling with anger, but humiliated.

"Treated me jest as ef I war a b'ar cub!" he growled. "Did ye ever see anything like et?"

"Py shings, ve neffer didt!" the baron admitted.

"I wish I could have got a picture of you right then, Nomad," said Wild Bill. "It was the funniest sight I ever met up with."

"Drap et!" Nomad snarled. "I ain't pleased with et."

"How did it happen?" asked Jameson.

"Yes, that's what I'm dying to know," agreed Lawson. "It rather beats anything I ever went up against."

Buffalo Bill climbed gingerly down from the boxes.

"Better keep your weapons handy," he warned, "and be ready to shoot if some chink up there takes a notion to shoot down at you!"

"We're watchin' fer 'em," said Jameson.

"I went out ter look round fer Sam Wah," Nomad explained. "I didn't find him, fer he had hiked. But when I got down inter ther street I seen him, headin' straight off toward Moy Wing's. Instid o' goin' on to Moy's, when he struck this street he went inter et; and me hikin' clost behind him, intendin' ter see what he war up ter. Then I come along hyar. I was clost on him, when he give a yell, looked up at ther winder, an' jumped. I didn't jump, an' ther hanged thing got me."

He looked up at the net and the window.

"I wasn't prepared fer et," he said; "ner you wouldn't been. But I has my opinion o' what it meant, sense I've had time to think a little. Et was meant fer Sam Wah, instid o' me. He wasn't two yards ahead of me hyer, as I was hurryin' to overtake him, intendin' to git a bit more talk out of him. Then, slam bang! down she comes, right on top o' me! Mebby ther chinks up thar didn't at fust know ther difference; er, mebby, havin' by a mischance snared me fer him, they thought they'd kerry et through and h'ist me, anyhow. Then—you come."

"It shows, if the theory is true, that the enemies of Sam Wah are ready for him," observed Lawson thoughtfully.

"I reckon you're right," Nomad agreed.

"Shall we try to git up to that window and into them buildin's?" said Jameson.

Buffalo Bill turned to Lawson.

"I don't think this building connects with the one under which you saw Bent Murdock."

"No, I don't think it does," Lawson agreed.

"It would probably be a waste of time, then, if we tackled those windows."

"Der cellars py der alley in for me," cried Schnitzenhauser. "I am vanting to dry dot umprella machine unt see dot Chinese yoss; unt especially dot Chinese money."

"We will try either the cellars or Moy Wing's restaurant," Buffalo Bill decided.

At that they turned back toward the main street, leaving the Chinese net dangling against the wall of the house. They had no doubt now that the intention of its users had been to capture Sam Wah rather than Nomad.

CHAPTER V.

BY THE UMBRELLA ROUTE.

Buffalo Bill had at length divided his party. Wild Bill had taken Nomad and Jameson, with the intention of forcing a way into the mysterious underground region of Chinatown by way of Moy Wing's chop-suey house; while the scout himself, with the baron and Lawson, were to make the attack from the alley and the cellars.

Night had come on rapidly, so the alley was dark when the scout's little party invaded it. It was deserted, too; and even out in the street, at the front, not a Chinaman had been seen. The sense of peril lying on Chinatown thus made itself manifest.

Lawson had quite recovered from his late unpleasant and perilous experiences. But he had learned nothing in the way of caution. In that respect he was as reckless as the baron. Perhaps he was just as lucky. The baron's luck was a matter of constant wonder.

Lawson and the baron wanted to scramble headlong into the cellars.

The scout preferred, however, to go carefully; so he crawled through the narrow door, in the lead, a revolver in one hand and a lighted lantern in the other.

"I am rightt pehint you fast, as der bear saidt ven he vos chasing der hundter," announced Schnitzenhauser, squeezing his thick body into the hole.

Then he stuck, his feet waving about in the alley and his hands waving about in the cellar.

"Yaw! I am fast, all rightt! I guess I vill haf to haf some hellup uff I ton'dt sday here all nightt. Yoost you gif me a bull, unt Misder Lawson he gan gif me a bush."

Buffalo Bill caught the baron's hands and snaked him out into the cellar.

"Ach! Der odder dimes I lose most all my skins in dot hole, unt now I lose 'em ag'in."

He scrambled up and out of the way as the small, lithe form of Sam Lawson, the insurance detective, came sliding through.

They closed the little door, after pulling the box as close against the wall as they could. Buffalo Bill then flashed his light round the cellar.

"Noddings doing," puffed the baron.

"I suppose we may as well tackle the umbrella room first," the scout suggested.

He moved toward it, followed by the others, each man alert, hand on weapon.

But they encountered no one.

Concerning the umbrella, they had come to the conclusion that it would not be found in its usual place; as the likelihood of its removal, since the discovery of its secret by the white men, had seemed more than probable.

They were surprised, therefore, on entering the umbrella cellar—as they had begun to call it—to find the huge umbrella ornamenting the centre of the ceiling just as when last seen.

Knowing so well the manner in which it dropped down upon any desired victim who had the temerity or foolishness to step under it, they contented themselves at first with regarding it from the corridor entrance.

Buffalo Bill flashed his lantern light, which revealed the old tea boxes and miscellaneous clutter; but no person could be discovered. And not a sound had been heard.

"Aber ve ton'dt seen anyt'ing, idt iss no assuredness dot he iss noddt here!" breathed the baron, peering in.

"We can explore the room safely if we keep close to the walls, beyond the spread of the umbrella," said Buffalo Bill.

He entered the room, flashing the light ahead of him.

Followed by Lawson and the baron, he made the circuit of the cellar. No enemies lay concealed in the holes and corners behind the boxes.

When they stopped they stood staring at the umbrella.

"You remember I told you that outside is a cord which works it, but in its present position that can't be seen," said Lawson. "It looks as if the Chinese have deserted this part of the house. If so, there's no reason why we can't mount to the upper rooms by means of the umbrella without trouble. I believe I can work that spring again."

But when Lawson had worked it the umbrella had already been lowered to the cellar floor by the Chinese. Whereas now it was close against the ceiling and beyond their reach.

The insurance detective stepped to the centre of the floor, where he could look straight up into the heart of the umbrella; thus risking its quick descent.

"If it should be dropped on you," warned the scout, "you could hardly escape it where you are."

"But it isn't dropping, you see!" said Lawson. "Which proves to me that no Chinese are on the floor above close by the umbrella. If they are they don't care to trap me, having perhaps had me there, as they may consider it, once too often."

He laughed lightly.

"The only way to get into those overhead rooms," he added, "is by way of that umbrella; but I'd like you to tell me how it is to be done."

"Right behind that tea box," said the scout, "there was a rope, by pulling which the umbrella was made to descend. And I recall that, by a spring hidden in the handle, it was made to ascend."

Saying this, Buffalo Bill stepped over to the tea box; but the rope was no longer there. A round hole through which it had been passed had been plugged with wood. When he succeeded in removing the wooden plug only the hole could be seen. Nor by delving in the hole with his fingers could he find an end of the rope.

"I give it up," he said; "the rope has been taken away."

"We could make the umbrella rise if once it were down here," declared Lawson. "How to get it down is what feazes me."

Buffalo Bill began to study the problem.

"Idt iss a kvestion mit me," said the baron, "uff dhem chinks ain'dt yoost vaidting for us to gidt incautious unt all standt under der umprella togedder. Uff dey should drop der umprella now idt vouldt sure gidt vun uff us—Miser Lawson. Maype dey haf got tired uff der redail pitzness unt now vandt to go indo der whole-sale. Vot you t'inks?"

"I think you've got a lively imagination," said Lawson, whose spirits were mounting, with the prospect that he would soon again be in the midst of strenuous deeds if he could have his way. "The Chinese whose business it is to manipulate this umbrella have simply skipped, no doubt because they were scared."

Buffalo Bill had come prepared with a strong lariat;

and its possible use he was now considering. He, too, had reached the conclusion that the Chinamen in charge of the umbrella machine had abandoned their post.

"You stand here, baron," he said, "with your revolver ready, and if you see peril coming to us, open with bullets through the ceiling there as fast as you can send them."

As the baron drew his hardware and prepared to get into quick action with it, the scout settled his lariat in a coil and stepped out into the middle of the room. The next instant the loop of the lariat flew with a quick jerk at the ceiling; and when the scout pulled on the free end the loop tightened round the umbrella handle.

"We may be able to start it in this way," he suggested. "Heave down here with me, Lawson!"

"Ouch!" squealed the German. "She iss coming!"

They believed afterward that the method which had suggested itself to the mind of the scout was at least one of those used by the chinks.

The heavy downward pull starting the umbrella, it dropped with its former swiftness; so that the scout and Lawson had not time to get out of the way. They evaded the stabbing blow of the weighted handle, and by throwing themselves flat escaped being rapped heavily by the bamboo ribs. Then the folds spread wide over them, with almost smothering effect.

But instantly the umbrella began to rise, clamping together, the iron-tipped bamboo ribs scraping over the floor and gathering them up almost as if they were sticks or straws.

The scout and the insurance man were slammed heavily up against the handle; and for an instant it began to seem that they would be jerked upward through the hole in the ceiling. But after this violent effort the umbrella stopped, just as the ends of the ribs cleared the floor and came together.

"Loogk oudt—loogk oudt!" the baron was squawking. "Idt iss gidding you!"

"It has got us, all right!" said the scout grimly, with a sense of relief when the queer machine halted.

Lawson was struggling and flouncing about, breathing heavily.

"I guess we're all right," he said. "If your friend was only in here now I could find that rope outside, or the spring in the handle here, and send the thing up."

The iron tips of the bamboo ribs, having come together, formed a footing for the passengers, to be used when the umbrella rose with them as its burden.

"Here is the spring," said Lawson, scratching round until he found it; "but I'm afraid to pull it, lest it may shoot us up before we are ready for the trip."

"I am in der darkness," they heard the baron declaring; "since you haf tookt der landern."

Buffalo Bill held the lantern, and it gave light to the cramped space of the interior of the umbrella.

"When it drops down," said the scout, "it opens apparently of its own accord. There must be some spring to open it from this end."

As they could not see any spring but the one indicated already by Lawson, and feared to try that, Buffalo Bill slit the umbrella, thereby opening a hole by which the baron could enter.

The baron came cautiously across the room, swinging his forty-five, and looking up at the ceiling.

"Usually a blendy uff excidemendts suidts Schnitzenhauser," he said; "but vot I am t'inking iss dot ve vill yoost haf too mooch uff ve findt apoudt dwendy chinks squadding round oop pehint der ceiling now, vaidting for us. Vot *you* t'inks?"

"We'll try it," cried Lawson. "Get your guns ready. If we have to fight there will sure be a merry little war up there. Crawl in here and we'll see quick what's happening."

The baron crawled into the hole made for him.

"Close kvarters!" he panted. "Uff dhis lifdting machines lifdts *me*, mit all uff you pesites, idt iss a good vun; I veigh yoost nodt kviet t'ree hoondert."

When Sam Lawson, with a reckless laugh, touched the lever in the handle, setting the umbrella in motion, it rose, but not with its former speed; the weight of the three men was a heavy load for it.

"The chink who harnessed this queer elevator to the water power of that underground stream was a mighty good mechanic," said Lawson. "It shows more brains than I ever thought a Chinaman had. Some of them must be pretty smart."

"They are smart, and they are very imitative. The chink who did it no doubt got all his ideas from some water power with which he was familiar; and of course bought American-made machinery. But this umbrella arrangement is, I should say, pure Chinese."

They heard the top of the umbrella bang against and lift the trapdoor in the ceiling and begin to scrape through the hole there; so they got ready for the warm reception they more than half anticipated.

But when the umbrella had swung up to its usual height, letting the trapdoor drop back in place, and had then suddenly spread out and spilled them to the floor, they found no one to bar their way.

The upper room was as deserted as the noisome cellar below it.

"Just as I said," declared Lawson, scrambling up and looking about. "Not a chink here; they've cut out."

"It seems so," the scout agreed.

"So you see, baron," went on Lawson, "your idea that they perhaps were wanting to go into the wholesale business had no foundation."

The umbrella had risen and hung poised above their heads now, its bamboo wings widespread. The light of the scout's lantern drove away the shadows. Having

gained their feet, the three men stood with revolvers ready.

"No one is here," said the scout.

"Which proves," said Lawson, "that the Hep Sing Tong men have given their enemies a bad scare. Perhaps they're even more scared since that net, with which they caught Nomad, failed to get Sam Wah."

"One guess is as good as another. Which way now, Lawson?"

The insurance detective looked about to get his bearings.

CHAPTER VI.

BUFFALO BILL AND THE CHINK PRIEST.

Fortunately Lawson's bump of location was well developed.

"I'm sure this is the way," he said; and led off in what proved to be the right direction. "The chinks have cleared out, so I'm hoping we'll have no trouble. The thing I fear, though, is that they may have shifted Murdock to some other prison. But why they are holding him puzzles me."

Buffalo Bill and the baron followed Lawson, stepping softly.

They had not gone a great distance when Lawson's guess that the chinks had deserted the place was given a rude shock.

He was declaring that he knew he was proceeding in the right direction, and that the place where he had found the joss could not be far off, when a rushing patter of slippered feet sounded.

This was followed by high-keyed, peculiar yells, accompanied by blows and the sounds of bodies falling.

"A fight!" said Lawson.

"Idt iss!" whispered the baron.

"We'd better get into the corner here," advised the scout, moving into the corner nearest.

He turned out the light of the lantern, so that they were in darkness.

Hardly had he done this when the door of a room broke open, not far off, and a howling, fighting mob came rolling out. It was like the bursting of a dam; the corridor literally overflowed with Chinamen.

The room from which they had come was dark, as well as the corridor. Not able to distinguish their enemies, the frenzied chinks were delivering blows indiscriminately. On the floor a number of them were rolling and fighting like maniacs.

The human tide flowed even into the corner where the scout and his companions had sought refuge. Buffalo Bill felt himself caught by a Chinaman. Feeling the movement of the chink's right arm, which probably held a knife or sword, the scout gave the Chinaman

a violent push back into the midst of the screeching rabble.

The fierce fighting did not last long; the Chinamen, except those who had dropped, poured on along the corridor, yelling in their strange, wild way.

The last was not out of the corridor when the scout made an amazing discovery. So far as his friends were concerned, he was alone; apparently they had been squeezed into the midst of the struggling mob and swept away by it.

On the corridor floor a wounded Chinaman groaned and sobbed.

"Hello!" Buffalo Bill called softly. "Are you there, Lawson? Are you there, baron?"

When he got no answer he ventured to strike a match and light his lantern.

Then he saw a grewsome sight. Four Chinamen lay dead in the corridor, one of them horribly ripped by a sword. Another Chinaman lay groaning, having received a sword cut across the breast, which had a bad look.

But nowhere were the scout's companions.

Made anxious by this, Buffalo Bill began to follow in the track of the fighting Chinamen. He could still hear their terrible uproar, and knew that the fight was being continued.

But though he came close up on the heels of them—so close that the light of his lantern was seen and he was forced to put it out again—he did not see his friends.

For some time Buffalo Bill hunted about vainly; then it occurred to him that the baron and Lawson, after being swept out of the corridor by the chink rush, had probably escaped it and fled; and perhaps they were even now hunting him.

The scout continued his search, relighting his lantern as soon as he felt that it was safe to do so.

He did not find Lawson and the baron; but in stumbling about he came to a room that he recognized, from the description, as the joss room which Lawson had been in.

It was a larger room than he had thought. Lined with curtains of red velvets and silks, it seemed probable that its true dimensions had been obscured to the insurance detective by its hangings.

Back a little from its centre stood the black joss, a hideous Chinese image of immense size, towering high over the head of the scout, as he looked up at it. The tip of the tongue protruded from the horrid mouth, and on each side of the tongue gleamed white teeth, probably of ivory. The whole expression of the huge face was so hideous, even fiendish, that the scout almost recoiled.

He found the little door at the back, concealed by cur-

tains, by which the priests gained entrance to the interior of the joss. He had wanted to locate this door, that he might take advantage of it in case of necessity, somewhat as Lawson had done.

While prodding among the silken and velvet hangings Buffalo Bill heard a light step. Some one was coming to the joss room.

Turning out his lantern and lifting the curtain nearest to hand, the scout crawled behind it, finding himself under what appeared to be a combination table and lounge. It furnished him just the security he required.

He was hardly ensconced when the steps he had heard entered the room. Almost immediately the dragon lantern at the ceiling, before the joss, was lighted.

Lying flat, with his face close against the floor, the scout saw now, through the silken fringe of the hangings, the legs and feet of a Chinaman.

"The priest!" was his thought.

Without hesitation the priest, for so it was, went to the small door, and drew himself at once into the interior of the metallic image. The scout did not hear the door close, and it gave him a suggestion.

So, as soon as he heard the priest mounting softly the tiny ladder, he pushed the hangings aside and crept out into the well-lighted room. In another moment or so he had tiptoed to the little door.

As he had expected, he found it ajar, though not wide open.

"He means to come right down!" was the scout's thought. "Well, I'll put a spoke in his wheel!"

He drew the door open softly, and as softly crawled inside. The interior space at the foot of the image was large enough to hold several men, but nowhere in it did there seem to be a place to hide; yet there may have been more than one, for the scout could not see very well, as the light of the dragon lantern had been nearly shut out—such light as came into the image entering somewhere at the top.

Crouching in the strange interior, Buffalo Bill looked up and saw the priest above him. What the fellow was doing Buffalo Bill did not know. But he had a shrewd idea that, in making this visit, the priest's object was to remove the gold coin seen by Lawson.

Feeling about, the scout laid his hand on the cabinet that held the coin.

But immediately he became aware that the priest was descending.

Buffalo Bill crouched against the wall until the priest was at the foot of the ladder. Then his arm shot out with the quickness of thought, and the priest felt the clutch of those masterful fingers at his throat.

Hurling the astonished and bewildered priest to the floor, the scout stuck the cold muzzle of the revolver against his face.

"Cry out," he whispered, "and you are a dead man!" That touch of cold steel caused the priest to collapse and drop back against the floor.

"You understand? Make a noise and I will shoot you! Who are you?"

The Chinaman made a chattering effort to speak; then blurted out the information that his name was Li Bing.

"Well, Li Bing, you are the priest here, and a cunning rascal, I don't doubt. But you will be safe so long as you do what I tell you. I am one of the desperate Americans—a 'foreign devil'; and there is no telling what a foreign devil may do once he is started."

He released his hold of the priest, but poked the revolver muzzle against the fellow's body.

Then he stooped and pushed open the little door, which let in a flood of light.

The priest was lying on his back on the floor, his face a tallowish yellow with fright, his narrow black eyes staring. The light revealed his shaven head and his priestly clothing, Chinese in character, but of the richest and costliest silks.

Prodding the priest again, to keep him quiet, Buffalo Bill backed through the door into the joss room; then he reached in and dragged the shivering and terrified priest out into the light.

When he set the fellow up against the joss he nearly fell over, so scared was he.

"I'm not going to hurt you, Li Bing," said the scout, "if you do what I want you to. You understand English? I know you do."

"No savvee muchee Englis'," said the priest.

"Then a little will have to do. Just answer a few questions now. There is an American held in here somewhere. You wouldn't probably recognize his name, but it is Bent Murdock. Do you know where that man is?"

Li Bing stared and gurgled.

"Think quick!" urged the scout, prodding him with the revolver. "Where is that American held? When we had news from him he was chained. You know who I mean."

"Melican devil killee me, hey?" wheezed the priest.

"Not if you do what I tell you."

"Whattee want?"

"I've just told you. Show me where this American is held—the one that has a chain on his leg."

"Then no killee me?"

"No, I won't kill you, or hurt you, if you obey me."

The priest arose, shaking with fear.

"But I'm not going to trust you, remember," the scout told him.

At his waist Buffalo Bill had the riata he had used in drawing down the umbrella machine. He flung a loop of it round the Chinaman's neck.

"Now lead me to the place where the American is held," he commanded.

The startled Chinaman gurgled and put up his hands to cast off the rope.

"Drop it! Lead me to that American."

Seeing that his state was hopeless, the priest shuffled from the joss room; then set out along one of the grimy, foul-smelling passages, which twisted its course as if it were a veritable rat hole. At times there was barely room enough to permit their passage; so that Buffalo Bill wondered what happened when Chinamen met.

"One must lie down and let the other crawl over him. Yet they saved work in making the galleries small; not so much earth must be taken out of a little one as out of a big one."

The scout was sure this was not the pathway which had led Lawson to the prison of Bent Murdock. Nevertheless, he followed the Chinese implicitly, feeling sure that with the rope round his neck and a revolver threatening him the priest would not dare to attempt deception.

He was right in that. In a little while a small, filthy room, little more than a hole in the earthen wall, was reached; and in it lay the object of the scout's search.

CHAPTER VII.

SECRETS OF THE BLACK JOSS.

Murdock started up, raving, when the scout and the priest came suddenly upon him; then dropped down, as he felt the pull of the chain that held his leg. He had seen the priest before he did the scout. But at once he was reassured.

"I'm Cody, you know—Buffalo Bill. I made this priest lead me to you. But we must be quiet."

The nearly crazed prisoner and victim of Chinese cruelty began a string of almost incoherent words.

"Another American was here while ago—not so long ago," said the scout; "and he gave us the first news we had that you were living, and where we ought to look for you. He is in these underground rooms right now, somewhere. How is that chain fixed on your leg?"

"It's locked there," said the prisoner, his voice trembling.

"Perhaps this priest can unlock it?"

The scout turned to the frightened Chinaman and made a motion toward the prisoner, indicating by the motion what he wished done.

"Take a look at him, Murdock," said the scout, when it began to seem that the priest was about to claim himself ignorant or unable to unlock the chain. "Has he been here before? He must have been, or he wouldn't have known the way to this place."

Murdock stared into the face of the shrinking priest, by the light of the lantern.

"Yes, he's the devil that put me here and has been keeping me here!"

"Then we will make him unlock that chain," said the scout, with determination.

"He is not one of those who jumped on me in the street and robbed me, and then brought me here; but he is responsible for keeping me here. Though likely I should have been killed if he hadn't taken the notion to chain me in this room. You see, the villain has a grudge against me because at one time I refused to let him have money out of the bank. I reckon I may have spoken sharp to him then. Anyway, he told me about it, and told me in his pidgin lingo that he meant to get even with me. And he has! It's a wonder I'm not crazy, or dead, in this hole."

Buffalo Bill had turned to the priest. He still held a grip on the rope round the Chinaman's throat, and stood ready to throw the priest down by a jerk on it, if needed.

"Unlock that chain!" he commanded.

The priest began to fumble in his silken clothing, and brought out some queer-shaped brass keys. One of them he fitted to the lock on the chain round the prisoner's leg, and the chain soon dropped away.

Murdock, who had been watching this nervously, sprang to his feet, as if he meant to run or yell; then reeled back against the filthy wall, almost too weak to stand.

Though believing that the priest was thoroughly cowed, Buffalo Bill watched him every moment, dropping a hand now and again to his revolver to attest the fact that he would shoot if it was needed.

"Now," he said to the priest, "lead us back to the place we came from."

By the flashing light of the lantern he caught a gleam of hope as it leaped into the man's yellow face.

"But no tricks!" he warned, tapping the revolver. "We are desperate men right now, knowing how much danger surrounds us; and we won't take chances. So I warn you!"

The Chinaman understood this so well that his manner changed and he again became cringing.

"Me do evel'thing honorable Melican man say," he declared.

"Then lead us back to the place we came from. Murdock, help yourself along by hanging to my arm. I shall need both hands, I think—one to hang onto this rope with and the other to use the revolver with if it's needed."

Murdock caught the scout's arm and pulled himself to his feet.

"Perhaps you can make him show us the way out," he

whispered, his voice as well as his body shaking. "It's a miracle to me that you got in here, thus far, and live. The place swarms with Chinamen."

"But the ones who belong here—the On Leon Tongs—aren't having such a free swing as a while back," the scout explained. "A lot of their enemies—Chinamen from San Francisco—have got in here; and some lively battles are going on, or were. We may not have so much trouble, as our enemies are right now very busy in looking out for their own carcasses. I'm free to say, though, that I'm troubled over what has become of the baron, and Lawson, the man who found you in here."

"He tried to free me, but couldn't; and then he had to leave me."

"Yes; he told us about it."

Buffalo Bill commanded the Chinese priest to move along; and, with Murdock hanging to the scout's arm, they began to move in the direction whence they had come, but at a slow pace.

Not a foe did they see, nor a single person, as they passed along the narrow, tortuous gallery to the joss room. And that no one had been in the joss room since the scout had seen it last seemed proved by the fact that the dragon lantern was still burning.

"How much money did the Chinese thieves take from you?" the scout asked Murdock.

"Nearly five thousand dollars, in bank bills and gold," Murdock answered. "It ruined me. What I shall do about it when I get out, if I get out, I don't know."

"There is a pile of Chinese money inside this black joss," the scout told him; "most of it, perhaps all of it, is in gold; and I suppose it is the property of the joss house and the priests who serve here. It might be poetic justice if we could get enough of it to make you even; for it looks very much as if this priest was either one of the thieves or profited by the theft. Anyway, he knew all about it, that's sure; and it's a thing which makes him as guilty as the guiltiest."

The priest understood enough of this to make him uneasy, as his looks and manner showed.

"How much gold you got in there?" the scout asked him.

The priest shook his head.

"Me no savvee."

The scout might have "argued" with him on that point; but unmistakable sounds in one of the passages announced that some one was coming. The priest turned quickly, looking with staring eyes at the red curtains on that side.

"No, you don't!" said the scout, jerking on the lariat, at the same time cocking his revolver.

"Murdock," he whispered, "on the other side of this image you will find a little door; by lifting the curtains you can get into the joss there, and I think you had better do it, for this looks like trouble."

Murdock hobbled to the other side of the joss with surprising speed and disappeared.

In another minute the sounds were right behind the curtain which the scout and the priest were watching; then the curtain swung aside, and in the opening revealed—which was a small door—appeared the heads of several Chinamen.

Seeing them, the priest gave a yell and made a jump toward them, in spite of the rope. The rope brought him to an ignominious halt, as the heads ducked back out of sight. Thinking the rope would be more valuable than the priest, the scout caught the loop from the rascal's neck. With another jump the priest hit the red curtains, which had dropped back into position; and, seeming to dive right through them, vanished from sight.

Buffalo Bill jumped quickly round the joss to the little door. He took time to coil the riata and swing it at his belt; he also again made sure that his revolvers were in working order and filled with cartridge, as he foresaw some fighting before he and Murdock got out of that place.

"You all right, Murdock?" he whispered.

"Yes," came the shivering answer.

A yell lifted beyond the silk curtains, and again the hangings swept aside and Chinese heads showed. The foremost Chinese was armed with an American revolver, and he fired as soon as he saw the scout.

His trembling hand or poor aim caused the bullet to go high; it struck the joss above the scout's head, and, glancing off, went into the wall through the red curtains.

Buffalo Bill returned the shot, aiming to wound rather than kill; then dived into the image through the door, which Murdock had left open. As he did so another revolver bullet came from the revolver held by the Chinaman.

Murdock was crouching on the floor in the scanty light that came in through the door. But Buffalo Bill's lantern gave good light to the interior, as soon as he was within and the door closed. Outside, the joss house was brilliantly illuminated by the dragon lantern against the ceiling.

They were not able to see their foes now. Buffalo Bill passed one of his revolvers to Murdock and told him to guard the door with it.

"Hold the door at all hazards," he warned; "it may mean our salvation. I'm going to climb this ladder and take a look out."

Stimulated by the change in his situation and his aroused hope of escape, Murdock was regaining his strength and courage. The clutch of the revolver aided in this.

"I'll kill any villainous chink that pokes his head in here!" he declared, in a way to show that he meant it.

"I think we're safe from them if we can hold that door," the scout told him. "The plates of brass, or whatever this joss is made of, seem heavy enough to turn a revolver bullet. The thing that rather astonishes me is that the chinks should shoot at their god!"

"The ruffians would do anything."

"It is likely that the thug element care very little for this joss or anything of the kind; it looks it."

"The priest is no better. He's a thieving old scoundrel, who would as soon commit murder as not. I've had reason to know."

The scout was climbing the ladder.

When he reached the eyes of the joss he did not reveal himself there by pressing close up to them to look out. Fortunately the head of the joss was so large that he did not need to; yet he was able to look into the room.

Now and then he saw a curtain swing aside and the revolver appear. A moment later he discovered that the Chinese had got into the room by another way; then he saw them, half concealing themselves behind the curtains. Their talk filled the room; but it was Chinese, and he did not know what they were saying.

Thinking that the door at the base of the image would be the point of attack, the scout descended, to put himself beside Murdock.

"See anything?" Murdock shivered. "I can hear a lot of the devils out there."

The lantern was on the floor. Looking down at it, the scout began to scan the floor. Suddenly he bent over and began to tap the boards softly with the butt of his revolver, the noise made by the Chinese enabling him to do this without being heard by them.

"Ha!" he said suddenly. "I think there is a door here under us, Murdock!"

Murdock stared.

"I hope so," he declared. "We might get out that way. Though, as there is no telling where it would lead to, we might be in a worse fix even than this."

"And this is bad enough, you think?"

"I've been in others that pleased me better. But I'd prefer the chances here, even if there were a thousand Chinamen out there, to being chained up by the leg in that hole. That was hell, Cody!"

"Keep a close watch of that door," said the scout, "while I investigate here."

"I'll shoot any one that tries to open it!"

The scout got down on his knees and began to search for the joints of the hidden door, as he believed it to be. He used his knife, digging about for cracks between the boards.

"Here it is," he announced jubilantly. "A trapdoor, set right in the floor under the joss. Ah! what was that?"

"What was it?" said Murdock, startled.

"I thought the floor moved."

"Perhaps the boards shook under the feet of those wild men out there."

"Perhaps so."

In a little while, by digging and prying with his knife blade, the scout was able to lift one edge of the door. The door was on hinges, and when started it came up readily. The opening revealed a black hole. Into it the scout thrust the lantern, and was trying to determine what was below when an exclamation from Murdock came to him.

"Say," cried Murdock, "didn't you feel the joss shake then?"

The scout drew back and held up the lantern.

He, too, distinctly felt and saw the joss shake.

"What's it mean?" said Murdock.

"I guess they're trying to tip it over. Yes, that's just what they're trying to do!"

"Shall I open this door and shoot out at them?"

"No, for that would give that fellow out there a chance to shoot back. We'll get ahead of them."

"How?"

The scout indicated the hole.

He looked at the stacks of coins neatly arranged in the drawers of the cabinet, now open.

"Help me here just a moment or two, Murdock," he urged; "we'll lift this cabinet and tumble the money in it right down into this hole; then we'll follow the money out of here. I'd like you to have this coin, to repay what the chinks took from you. It seems to me it will be a fair deal, if we can make it."

"Yes, if we can make it!"

Murdock jumped to the aid of the scout. Together, even though Murdock had no great strength, they moved the cabinet and its load over to the hole in the floor and there tipped the contents down into the black hole.

"Look out!" yelled Murdock, startled; for the joss lifted and tipped again.

Both he and Buffalo Bill saw a crack yawn at one side, where the image was hoisted bodily off the floor. But the crack closed again. Yet there was no doubt now that the Chinamen had secured levers, and would sooner or later turn the joss over on its side. As it was hollow and rested on the floor, that would at once expose the white men who had taken refuge in it.

"The joss will go over the next time!" cried Murdock, in a panic.

"All right, if we can get out of it before it happens."

Buffalo Bill thrust the lantern again into the hole. This time he saw a small ladder leading down. He announced the discovery.

"They heard us throw that money down there, and it has made them wilder than ever," said Murdock.

"The joss lifts again, Cody! They're going to make it this time; sure as guns, they are! There! See that edge rising?"

"Down with you, then!" said the scout.

He caught Murdock by the arm and pulled him to the hole.

"Crawl down as fast as you can; I'll come right after you. I'll stop long enough to hold them back."

Murdock yelled with fear, seeing the crack against the floor widening and letting in the light of the outer lantern.

Buffalo Bill steadied him on the ladder, and so aided him to go down with good speed; then the scout himself swung over.

Where the crack was showing between the floor and the lower edge of the body of the joss appeared a yellow hand holding a revolver. The revolver cracked as soon as the hand appeared, and the bullet came unpleasantly close to the scout.

He flung himself into the hole, clinging to his lantern; then went down with a leap, stopping only long enough to draw the trapdoor into place over his head.

At almost the same moment the trembling of the floor and the wild yells of the Chinese told him that the joss was rising under the levers.

"Down with you!" he cried to Murdock, who had halted and was clinging to the ladder.

"It's so dark down here that I can't see!" stammered Murdock.

"I'll go first, then, if I can get by you."

The scout squeezed past and over Murdock and led the way down the ladder.

"Come fast now," he said. "They'll open that trapdoor, so that you will be in great danger there. We've got to move quick."

Murdock almost fell.

They gained the bottom of the ladder, where they found a little rat hole of a passage. Then they heard the joss go over with a thundering crash.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDER THE JOSS ROOM.

A wild clamor sounded in the joss house, following the fall of the black image and the discovery that the Americans had made a clever escape.

"That astonished them some!" said the scout grimly.

He had set down the lantern, and stood as if at bay beneath the trapdoor, his revolver in hand.

"But they'll see at once how we got out," said Murdock.

"No doubt of that. Ah! they've made the discovery!"

The clamor following the discovery that the expected victims of their fury had slipped through their fingers

had died, and now some of the Chinese were hammering on the trapdoor, trying to open it.

"Just as a warning to caution!" said the scout, as he fired a shot through the trapdoor into the joss room.

Sounds of startled Chinamen tumbling back to get out of the way of the bullet which had torn past them were heard immediately after the loud report of the revolver.

But the chink who was armed with a similar weapon fired back through the trapdoor, sending his bullet within an inch of Murdock's head. Murdock's exclamation made the scout think at first he had been hit.

"Move farther along, where you will be safe," Buffalo Bill urged; "and I'll get farther back, too."

"You're going to make a stand here?"

"I don't want them to crowd us too hard right now. If you feel able, I wish you'd take the lantern and look along this passage. Perhaps, without going far, you can see what sort of a hole we are in."

Murdock took up the lantern and began his exploration.

"Bang!" went the revolver again, in the joss house.

The bullet splintered through the trapdoor, but did not come near the scout, as he had moved back into the passage.

"Bang!"

The scout answered the shot.

"Just to make them know that we're down here and in fighting condition," he remarked grimly. "Pretty soon, by the way the splinters fly, the bullets will make a hole through that door."

While he had the light of the lantern he had looked about as well as he could, wondering where this rat hole of a passage led to. His conclusion had been, naturally, that it was used by the priest as a means to get out of the joss when the joss house was filled with Chinese and he did not want his movements known. The whole thing—the hollow joss, the trapdoor, the hidden passage, and the money stacked in the cabinet, spoke of priestly craft.

"Cunning fellows, these Chinese priests," thought the scout. "I wonder what the chinks think, now that they see through some of the joss-house shams?"

Apparently their discoveries did not feaze them; which made Buffalo Bill conclude that perhaps these men had all along known about the hollow joss and the hidden door leading into it.

"They may have been in the confidence of the priest. But—well, I give it up! There are some things about the Chinese character that no white man can fathom."

The Chinese revolver wielder had fired again through the trapdoor.

The scout replied. Both shots tore splinters out of the wood.

At this juncture Murdock came back with the lantern.

"I can't tell where this passage goes," he said. "It's so narrow in one spot that a dog could hardly crawl through it. But the reason I didn't try to go any farther was that I thought I heard sounds of fighting farther on."

"In the passage?"

"I don't know where it was."

"I'm very much worried about my friends."

"Well, I'm sorry if they've got into trouble on my account! Are the chinks going to get through the trapdoor here?"

"We can hold them back as long as we want to—or as long as my cartridges last. Only one man at a time could get down there, even if the trapdoor was open; and it would be easy enough to stop him with a bullet. But the thing I'm afraid of is that they will get into this passage beyond us and hem us in here."

"That's so! Of course that priest can show them how to get into this passage from the other end. They could put us between two fires."

The scout took the lantern and flashed its light down on the coins scattered on the floor.

"That's gold money, don't you think?" he asked.

Murdock stooped, ran his hands through one of the heaps, then inspected individual coins.

"Yes, it's gold." He tossed a coin. "About the weight of a twenty-dollar gold piece," he said. "I wish we could get it out of here; but we can't, of course. If we get ourselves out we'll do well."

"But perhaps we can hide it and come again for it. Or we may, by knowing where it is, make some dicker with the thieves who robbed you."

"You seem to believe we'll get out of here, and even capture some of the thugs who captured me?"

"I can't afford to let myself doubt it, can I?" said the optimistic scout. "A man fights better if he thinks he is going to win, and wins oftener."

"I used to feel as you do about everything; but, somehow, since being chained up as I was——"

Realizing suddenly that it was his duty to be as hopeful as the scout, Murdock did not finish his sentence.

"Bang!"

Another bullet shattered through the trapdoor, fired by the Chinaman in the joss room.

The scout fired back.

"Just to let them know that we're here and ready for them!" he said.

But at once he began to consider how they could hide the coins.

Taking the lantern, Buffalo Bill walked along the narrow passage. Soon he came to a place where the walls had caved in at one side, throwing down a lot of earth. It was the point where Murdock had said a dog could hardly get through; and the scout saw that Murdock was so far right in it that some excavating would be needed.

But the fallen earth suggested the thought that here would be a good place to secrete the coins.

So he went back to Murdock, who had remained close by the trapdoor.

"Where that dirt has fallen down," he said, "we can hide this money. If later we think that the priest ought to have it it will be an easy matter to get word to him where it is."

"They'll find it before that," said Murdock, "as they're bound to see any marks we may make in digging there."

"We've got to do some digging to get through—they can see that when they come to the place; and perhaps they will think our digging was for that reason only and will make no search for the coins. It's the best we can do, anyway. Now, if you'll help me get the coins to that point."

Murdock was eager to save the money, for he hoped that he could get hold of it later, and so reimburse himself for that which had been taken from him by the Chinese thugs.

They worked rapidly, and soon made the transfer. Now and then, however, "Just to show them we're still here!" as he said, the scout sent a shot through the trapdoor.

There was a good deal of noise and confusion in the joss room, proving that at least some of the Chinamen were there; but the growing feeling with the scout was that others had gone and would try to block their egress from the passage.

Buffalo Bill and Murdock scraped and dug away at the earth until they had enlarged the hole, and in doing so covered the coins.

"It's the best we can do," said the scout. "We'll leave this just as it is and go on."

He pushed the lantern ahead of him through the hole and crawled through. Murdock came right behind him.

"One of these times this tunnel is going to fall down," said Murdock uneasily. "The way it is timbered, it's a wonder to me it has stood up so long. Why do the Chinese burrow out such places? They seem to be human rats."

"They've been called that," said the scout. "If they hadn't been used to close-herding for unnumbered generations this air would poison them; and I wonder that it doesn't."

They had not gone much farther when they heard the sounds which had before attracted Murdock's attention.

"Fighting going on, eh?" he said, as they stopped to listen.

"Perhaps so. But where it is, who can say?"

"I'm sure I can't."

"So all we can do is to go ahead and see what happens."

Buffalo Bill went on, groping his way by the light of the lantern. And Murdock followed. It was a noisome hole, and they wished themselves well out of it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BARON AND THE INSURANCE MAN.

The baron and Lawson had been swept aside and separated from Buffalo Bill by the sudden rush and invasion of the Chinese, as will be remembered.

Fortunately they kept together. Even more fortunately, the fight was between men of the Hep Sing Tong and the On Leon Tong. Hence the two white men were not only not involved in it, but their presence was not even discovered at once.

Borne along like chips before a whirlwind, they heard, all round them, and particularly behind them, the rapid shuffling and scuffling of slipshod Chinese feet, together with Chinese yells, inarticulate, but murderous; and the crash of steel against steel, with sickening blows now and then when the steel bit into human flesh.

Flung into an eddy, in an angle of the wall, Lawson and the baron had discretion enough to duck down there and make themselves as small as possible as the human tempest and whirlwind went by.

The Chinese were gone inside of five minutes—all that could go.

"Mine gootness!" the baron gasped. "I am sdill lifing, huh?—or am I a deadt vun?"

"Did you ever encounter such madmen?"

"Neffter. I haf heardt dot China iss a overbopulated country, but idt cannot pe vhere sooch killers as dey are lifing. I t'ink dare musdt pe as many as ten deadt mans oudt in dhis hall already yedt."

"I wish we had a light so that we could see."

"Unt pe seen, huh? Oxcuse me! I am rightd now preferring der darkness. Dose chinks vill pe coming pack, maype so."

"Do you suppose we can find Cody?"

"Vot I am afeardt of iss dot maype he iss kilt. Idt vouldt nodd pe a surprises. Vich vay dit ve gidt here, eenyhow?"

"That way."

"Vich vay?"

"Why, the way we came."

"Aber I t'ink me so-o, I ton'dt know vich vay dot iss. You sdart oudt in der leads, unt I vill hang py your goat tails, so dot I ain'dt losdt in dhis darkness."

"I don't suppose we could risk it to call?"

"Ve couldt risk idt, but idt vouldt pe a foolishness."

They started forth, Sam Lawson leading, the baron clinging to him. They had not gone three steps until they stumbled over a body.

"Ach! A chink!"

"I suppose so."

"You subbose so? Vot else couldt idt peen?"

"I was thinking that if Cody was killed we might stumble right over him and not know it. Shall I risk a match?"

They stood listening before settling the question.

"I ain'dt hearing noddings."

"Nor I."

Lawson scratched a match softly on his trousers and flashed its light down on the form they had run against.

"A chink! Yoost vot I t'ought me."

"And there are more right ahead of us," said Lawson, blowing out the match.

"Idt iss a rec'lar grafeyardt. But go aheadt. Ve can strike matches unt see vere ve are, so dot ve ain'dt gedding losdt. I subbose you are knowing vare ve ar-re py now; I don'td."

They avoided as well as they could the bodies they had seen, and went on a considerable distance with much care.

"Ach!" cried the baron, suddenly jumping round. "Dey ar-re coming again."

The sounds of running feet reached them once more with great distinctness.

"Shall I risk a match before they get near, to see where we are and what we had better do?"

"I yess so. I am hidding my headt too many dimes to suidt me."

When Lawson flashed his second match they found they were near the end of a narrow, dismal tunnel.

"Wow!" he exclaimed. "This isn't the tunnel we got here by."

"Idt is der vun ve got here right now py, eenyhow."

"But not the one we were in when we were separated from Buffalo Bill."

"I tolt you I dit not know vare I vos, unt I meandt idt. Ach! Dose tuyfels are coming kvick again."

"From the sounds they will be right on top of us in a minute. This match must go out. Look quick, and see if you notice a hole that we can get into."

"I am seeing a door."

"Where?"

"On der righdt hant pesite me. Idt ton'dt loogk like a door, but idt iss; as I see der grack vare idt iss half-vay oben."

The match went out and the baron moved toward the door. It opened into a foul-smelling, stuffy room. As soon as they were inside the baron closed the door, while Lawson risked another match.

"Looks like the little prison they held Murdock in," said Lawson, "but it isn't; at least, I think not. But there is no way to get out of it, and here we are. But better here, perhaps, than out in that dog hole of a tunnel."

"Yaw. Mit der chinks coming."

The sounds of pattering feet had come much nearer.

It seemed that the wave of fighting men had rolled back and was about to be precipitated upon them.

Lawson and the German stood ready for any emergency, scarcely breathing, revolvers in hand.

The wave of men reached the door, and the door was flung inward, almost in the faces of the two men.

The roar of the baron sounded; and the man who had butted into him went flying out again, hurled out bodily by the baron's muscular arms. Lawson threw out another.

"Ach! Close der door!" the baron shouted.

The men flung out had been set on, apparently, and were defending themselves. It gave the baron and Lawson time to close the door and place themselves against it.

"Vile I am holding idt," panted the baron, "you sdrike anodder matches, unt see if you can't findt somed'ing in der vay uff a prace."

Lawson hurriedly scratched another match and looked round the room. All he saw was an old box and a broken-legged table. These he pushed against the door; then dropped the match and trod it out.

By this time the Chinese outside had become aware that in the occupants of the little room they had other than Chinese to deal with. The white men judged that the two chinks thrown out had been chased into the narrow passage, and now had been done for. They heard a tempest of Chinese talk; then came a hammering on the door, with what was evidently a demand to open it.

"Oben idt yoursellufs!" howled the desperate baron.

"If you try it," shouted Lawson, "you get a bullet!"

The Chinese drew back and rammed the door by hurling themselves against it. The table flew back and a crack appeared, it was plainly to be seen by the light of the Chinese lanterns outside, with the head of a Chinaman thrust through it.

Lawson fired, and the head vanished; the door flying shut, so that the light seemed to go out as if extinguished.

"Ach! Dit you hidt him?"

"Likely not. But I think I scared him."

They pushed the box and the table again in position and tried to brace them there. They also threw their weight against them.

Outside sounded a high-keyed Chinese voice, making some demand.

"If you try to get in you will run against a bullet!" Lawson shouted.

"Ach! You vill run against two pullets, vich is vorser. Petter you keeb a liddle oudt."

In spite of the warning—which probably they did not understand—the Chinese again rammed the door. It withstood this shock better than the first; but by pushing against it the Chinese, by their mere weight, began

to drive it open, sliding the table and box back into the room, and also the men who were holding the door.

Lawson caught up his revolver, and by firing a shot through the door stopped this and gave a brief respite.

But it was clear to both him and the German that their position was most precarious.

"Ve might make a sudden choomp unt gidd into dot tunnel, unt fighdt our vay outd," was the baron's desperate suggestion. "Uff ve sday in here ve are sure deadt men."

"And if we jump out there we are dead men."

"Ach! Ve are kilt, eenyhow you look at idt. I am vishing——"

There was a sound behind them, as of a door moving; and they became aware that a door had opened there and some one was entering.

"Vot iss?" said the baron. "Sbeak oop pefore I shooldt you."

A match scratched, and the light revealed to their amazed eyes the face of a Chinaman. He had come through a little door at the back of the room, of whose existence they had not known.

"The honorable Melican men vill follow me all very fine and quick?" he said, and blew out the match. "I am Sam Wah, from 'Flisco. You savvee me! It is not to stay if we would make the soon escape."

"Ach! Idt iss you? Vell, eenypody iss petter as nody rightd now. Yoost leadt aheadt unt you vill findt us behint your pack."

Lawson braced the table and box against the door again, and turned hastily to follow Sam Wah into the darkness. He could not have declared certainly that this Chinaman was Sam Wah; but he was willing to take the risk to get out of that hole, in which he soon expected to meet his finish. The door was small; but the match having revealed its location, they found no trouble in passing through it behind the Chinaman.

"Vare you come from, huh?" asked the baron, puffing heavily.

"The fine honorable Melican men follow me," came the command, instead of an answer.

"Yaw. Ve vill dooded idt. Yoost you go right alongk. But haf you seen somed'ing uff Puffalo Pill?"

"The honorable Melican scout is safe in this time."

"Then he is living?" said Lawson.

"Ach!" cried the baron. "Dey are coming against der door ag'in. Vell, ledt 'em came; ve ain'dt dare eeny longer."

They were following the sound of Sam Wah's slippered feet, and they were in another little tunnel; or perhaps it was a branch of the same one, they could not tell about that.

"You know where Buffalo Bill is?" asked Lawson.

"Take Melican man to the fine honorable scout."

"That's good! But I hope we can get out of this

place soon. Can you tell us anything about Bent Muddock? We came in here to help him."

"All same fool for do that," snapped the Chinaman.

"Ach! Idt iss some vise conclusions. Uff ve gidd outd oursellufs alife unt all right idt vill pe a miraculousness. Vot you t'ink."

"Melican man talkee too much."

"I guess that's right," said Lawson. "Lead on. We'll stop sinning in that way."

They turned an angle, and their guide stopped. The baron, right behind, ran into him.

"Vot iss?"

"I am finding the honorable door," the Chinaman explained.

"Haf you whipped der odder vellers?"

"Many On Leon Tong men are dead; they are cowards and run like rats."

"I am peliefing dot somepody has been running."

They heard the Chinaman push open the door; and a breath of damp air reached them.

"Is this the way out of the place?" asked Lawson.

"In here the honorable Melican men will stay a while, until it is better."

Sam Wah let them stumble forward into the darkness; then he closed the door quickly, and they heard a key click in the lock. The thing was almost startling.

"Ach! Ve are brisoners, huh?" gasped the baron.

"Well, I hope not," said Lawson.

"Sdrike a matches, so dot ve gan seen somed'ings."

Lawson used another match; and by its light they looked round, finding they were in another room, like the one they had come from.

"Idt iss vorse as a chail," grunted the baron.

"But better than sudden death, my dear baron; better than death."

"Yaw! Idt iss so. But I am hobing dot ve ton'dt haf to sday in here werry longk."

CHAPTER X.

WILD BILL'S PARTY.

Wild Bill's party, consisting of himself, Jameson, and Nomad, had entered the mysterious regions back of and beneath Moy Wing's restaurant, by passing through the restaurant itself.

Brodie Towne had said that Moy Wing had deserted his post. They found this quite correct. Not only had the fat keeper of the chop-suey house taken himself away, but he had locked the doors of the restaurant and of the stairway and rooms leading to it.

Jameson had come supplied with keys, and, being the marshal of the town, with authority to enter such a place, he did not hesitate.

They found no one at the wire-barred window; no

waiters in the restaurant; no cooks in the cook room. Nor were any lights burning. Jameson lighted some of the lamps, and they looked the deserted place over.

Having done that, they pushed on into the opium and fan-tan rooms, finding there the same desolation of emptiness.

Then they descended, through certain trapdoors long before discovered, into the regions below stairs, and down into the cellars with which they were familiar, even going down to that singular room through which ran the underground stream.

Now and then, as they stumbled along by the light of their lanterns, they stopped, thinking they heard slippered feet. But where the sounds were they could not tell.

A long time they spent in the rooms and cellars, searching and searching, hoping to open up some channel of which they were ignorant. Whatever other hidden rooms there were had been so cleverly concealed that Wild Bill's party had their labor for their pains.

"What I'm wonderin' about," said Nomad, in one of the intervals between the strenuous periods of searching, "is how Buffler is gittin' along?"

"I hope he's having better luck than we are," said Wild Bill.

"Same here," Jameson agreed; "fer this is the wust luck ever. We ain't even scarin' out a mouse."

"Ther thing we orter done," suggested Nomad, "was to have captered that Sam Wah, what knows these holes, him bein' a chink, and made him show us about. Et don't look as ef we're ever goin' ter run onter Murdock. He sure cain't be down hyer."

They were making their way back to the rooms above, when, in turning a corner, old Nomad caught sight of a flowing Chinese robe.

The next instant, with a bellow, the old trapper hurled himself in pursuit.

But for an accident, however, the Chinaman would have got away, as he was a fleet runner. He tripped himself on the long robe and fell sprawling. Before he could rise the trapper was sitting on him.

"Waugh!" Nomad yelled. "Hyar I've got him. Come b'ilin'. Waugh!"

They came "b'ilin'."

Before they reached the trapper and his prisoner the latter was surprising Nomad by asking, in fair English, to be released. Though amazed, Nomad had no notion of complying; but roared at the concealed head of the man he had nabbed:

"I reckon you air thet whelp they calls Yu Lee! Ef so, we has got a crow ter pick with yer; fer you're the cus-tomer thet throwed Brodie Towne ter ther rats o' ther underground crick, and held Nellie Kelso a pris'ner, intendin' ter make her marry ye—you yaller, misbe-mannered rat eater!"

But when the others came up with their lanterns, and the robe and mask were stripped from the head and shoulders of the prisoner, the Chinaman was seen to be the San Francisco Hep Sing Tong man, Sam Wah.

"Thattee is what I tellee the honorable fine Melican man," Sam Wah protested, angered by the rough treatment he had received at the hands of the trapper.

"Waal, I dunno as et makes so much diff'rence," the trapper declared stolidly. "You're the yaller-faced critter I chased down inter thet street ther time thet ther Chinees net got me, thinkin' et was gittin' you."

But he let Sam Wah stand up, as he was under the revolvers of the white men. Then the robe and mask were removed by Sam Wah himself.

"It Yu Lee's," he said, "the On Leon Tong leader; you savvee him."

The robe was of black silk, with wide folds, and the mask, or headpiece, was of the same material. The peculiar thing was that on the headpiece, red circles were drawn round the eyes and the mouth in needlework. And on the bosom of the robe, worked in red, were the outlines of a skull and cross-bones. So that the wearer of the mask and robe was given a hideous and even frightful appearance.

"What made ye run ef you're ther friend of us, as yer says?" Nomad asked. "And what made yer run when I chased after ye some time ago, out in ther street? Thet chase come nigh bein' my finish!"

Sam Wah explained glibly enough. He had been threatened by Jameson with the jail, and so had departed hurriedly the first time. This second time, he admitted, he had no desire to meet the white men yet.

"Why not now, as well as some other period?" demanded Jameson.

"Allee same not ready," was the answer.

"See here, Sam Wah," said Wild Bill, taking a hand in the examination. "I'm your friend, just as Cody is; and you ought to know it. I've done nothing, I think, to gain your ill will. We came down here hunting for Murdock, but admit that we have made no headway. It's probable that you know where he is held. So we'd like you to tell us, and show us the way, if you will. Also, if you know anything recently about Buffalo Bill and the men with him, Lawson and the baron—they're down here somewhere—we'd like to know that."

"Littlee while ago," said Sam Wah, "me helpee fat man and the othel man."

"The baron and Lawson!"

"They velly muchee danger; On Leon Tong men tly to killee them. In littlee room, where no can get out. So I show the way out and take them to nothel room."

"Waugh! Is thet straight?"

"Him velly sleight. Me no foolee Melican man."

"So they're safe," said Jameson; "that's good! I'm hopin' the On Leon Tong thugs don't find 'em?"

"You'll have to show us where they are," Wild Bill told the Chinaman.

"Also," said Nomad, "we'd like news o' Buffler. Has ye run acrost him er heard o' him?"

"And Murdock," said Jameson. "I'm mighty in-t'rested in Murdock."

Sam Wah was seen to hesitate.

"Me 'flaidee say," he urged.

"Waugh! Out with et! Do ye know suthin'?"

"Allee same me hear they have lottee touble in joss house; me nottee know for sure; me nottee see them at all."

"Er, waugh! What did yer hear?" demanded Nomad.

"Me hear the honorable Melican scout gittee um plisoner; makee tly to findee way out. No can do. So they run quick by the joss house. Plentee On Leon Tong chasee them, and the honorable joss priest he chasee them. They run velly much fast, and so gittee inside the joss; and then the bad On Leon Tong thlow ovel the joss and killee them."

"Waugh! Er, waugh! Do ye reckon thet can be so?"

Wild Bill and Jameson, startled by this account, began to ply the Chinaman with questions.

He answered straight enough. As for knowledge, he had none; all he knew had reached him in the way of flying talk. Some of his Hep Sing Tong men had heard the fight in the joss house, and had overheard On Leon Tong men declaring that the American scout and the man with him had been killed when the joss was overturned.

"Sounds bad," said Jameson.

"Wuss'n bad," avowed Nomad. "But I ain't goin' ter believe et—yit."

"Nor I," declared Wild Bill. "Cody isn't a man to go under easy."

"I'm bettin' on one thing sure," remarked Jameson; "if he and the ombray with him went under they took a heavy weight of chinks across the river with 'em."

Having got started, Sam Wah became communicative, and went on to tell of other things.

"You see um Yu Lee robe?" he said, referring to the robe and the mask he had worn. "Me have fightee with Yu Lee. Him leader of On Leon Tong; velly bad Chinaman. Me takee robe; and then, when I am going to killee him, he makee the gitaway; he run so velly fast me no can catchee him. Him gleet coward."

He tossed his head in contempt of the On Leon Tong leader.

"Me puttee on robe and mask, so I can makee the fool of the On Leon Tong, mebbysso; but you findee me and stoppee me. And so it is."

He shot an unpleasant look at Nomad, the man who had stopped him.

"Do you reckon you could still work it—fool 'em by

wearin' them things?" asked the Cyanide marshal. "Fer if you kin I'm willin' you should try it. But, first off, we want you to show us where these Americans air that you've told us about."

Sam Wah caught up the robe and the mask.

"Me can tly," he said; and began to put them on. "Makee me look allee same like bad Yu Lee; mebbysso me can foollee the On Leon Tong."

"Do you know where they are right now?" Wild Bill questioned.

"No can say. They hidee; they gleet cowards—the On Leon Tong."

He puffed out his cheeks in scorn.

"They lun like labbits."

"Waal, I reckon I'd like ter be movin'," urged Nomad, in an uneasy tone. "No tellin' what's happenin' ter Buffler while we're wastin' time chinnin' hyer. I'll feel better doin' suthin'."

"Now lead us to the two white men you told us about," commanded Wild Bill, when Sam Wah had put on the robe and mask of the On Leon Tong leader. "After that, if we find him all right, we'll make a hunt for Cody. If there was a man with him, as you said you heard, it must have been Murdock, which would indicate that Cody found him and got him free."

"Me takee you now," said Sam Wah; and he started off.

CHAPTER XI.

BY WAY OF THE JOSS HOUSE.

Through a deserted gallery, with a sharp turn to the right, went Sam Wah, guiding Wild Bill's party by the light of the lanterns. He was a startling object in his robe and mask.

Finally he stopped before a small door.

"Allee same in here, mebbysso," he said, as if he doubted it.

He rapped softly.

"Vot iss?" came in the unmistakable voice of the baron.

"So you're in there and alive, you old cimaron?" said Wild Bill, in a tone of joy.

The others added their voices, in various exclamations, while Sam Wah was fitting a key to the door.

When he pushed it open the baron and Sam Lawson bolted out into the light and into the presence of their friends.

"Waugh!" Nomad exclaimed. "Seems too good ter be true. Yit et do look as ef you had been helt in jail."

"Unt I haf peen t'inking dot I am in chail," sputtered the baron. "How you haf gitted here, huh?"

"We have to thank Sam Wah fer this," Wild Bill told them. "Here he is—and a straight Chinaman."

"He looks like a fright, though," added Nomad. "But yer cain't allus judge er man by his looks."

"Lookee like this, can foolee the On Leon Tong, mebby," said Sam Wah.

There was much handshaking, and many compliments were passed on the Chinaman who had guided them; with acknowledgments from Lawson and the baron that he had in all things served them well.

"I'm thinking," said Lawson, "that we would have been dead men if he hadn't come to our aid."

"Vot haf peen skeering me," said the baron, "iss dot maybe so he gits kilt while he iss gone; unt how are ve to gidt out? I am sveating like a horse when I t'ink uff dot."

"Et would er put ye in a bad fix," commented Nomad; "fer I'm free ter say thet ther chances o' us ever findin' ye, without help, warn't bigger than pin heads; I reckon we couldn't done et."

"So we have to thank our friend, Sam Wah, for a good many things," declared Wild Bill. "Now we will thank him again if he will show us how to connect with Buffalo Bill and Bent Murdock—if it is Murdock."

"Ach! You have news from Cody?" said the German.

"Sorter news," said Nomad; "but et ain't encouragin'; Sam Wah says likely Cody is dead; which we ain't believin'. He heard thet Buffler got with Murdock—at least with some white man—and thet they was killed in the joss house by the tumblin' down o' the joss. We ain't goin' ter credit et."

"But we want to begin a search right now," said Wild Bill. "Will you help us again, Sam Wah?"

The Chinaman was acting as if he wanted to be off and about other business.

"Me nottee got much time," he urged. "Hep Sing Tong needee me. Maybe they have hot time with On Leon Tong."

"Can you take us to that joss house?" asked Wild Bill. "We'll begin the search there."

Sam Wah stood still, listening; though if he heard anything it was not apparent to the others.

Then he turned abruptly and started along the narrow passage.

"Joss house not velly far," he said; "me takee you."

They crowded eagerly after him.

"I've been in that joss house, as you recollect I told you," said Lawson; "but I'd never been able to locate it again, I know. Anyway, this doesn't seem the way to it to me."

"Allee samee light way," Sam Wah flung back at him.

The Hep Sing Tong leader was right and the distance was not far.

In a little while they reached the red-curtained room containing the hideous Chinese god.

The room was in great confusion, the curtains were

torn, and the great joss lay overturned on the floor. In its fall it had broken some of the boards of the floor, so that gaping rents showed. In addition, the little trap-door which had been right under it stood open.

The first thing that the invaders of the joss house looked for were evidences of Buffalo Bill and his companion, supposed to have been Murdock. In spite of their declared hopefulness, they were afraid they would find mutilated bodies.

Under one of the curtains, half hidden by it, they discovered the body of a Chinaman, whose head had been nearly severed by a sword. His blood had dyed the curtain a deeper red.

In the trapdoor were a number of bullet holes, while splinters were all over the joss-house floor.

Wild Bill looked critically at the bullet holes and splinters.

"See here!" he said. "These tell a story."

Nomad jumped to his side.

"Right ye air," agreed the old trapper.

"Some of the bullets came up out of that hole, and some went down through the door into it, as you can tell by the manner in which they splintered the wood; the ones that came up threw the splinters round this room."

"What do you make out of it?" asked Lawson, joining them.

"It is evidence of a fight between some men in the hole down there and other men who were up here. My first guess would be that Cody was up here and the chinks came on him from that direction; and he stood his ground here. But perhaps the chinks forced open the door and there was a fight in here. That dead Chinaman over there shows there was a fight."

But Wild Bill revised this opinion when he had made, with Nomad, a closer inspection.

"Cody was down there and the chinks up here," he said.

"How do you make that out?" demanded Lawson.

"By the size and nature of the bullet holes. The bullets that came from below were out of a forty-five, and that's the size of gun Cody carries. These others were made by a thirty-two; Cody had no revolver of that small calibre, and I know it."

"Unless he captered et of some one," said Nomad.

"I'm believing that he didn't; and that he swung the forty-five, which made the larger holes."

He called to the others, who were prowling round the joss house.

"I'm going down into this hole," he announced; "because I'm sure Cody was down there. My guess is that he retreated that way before the chinks, who tried to get at him in this room. Who goes with me?"

"Count me in," said Nomad.

"Me also-o!" yelled the baron, running over to them.

In a minute every member of the party had declared for Wild Bill's plan, and they stood ready to descend into the tunnel with the lanterns.

But just then came a defection. Sam Wah had heard something which had caused him uneasiness. He declared suddenly that he was needed by the Hep Sing Tong men; and he dived into a passage and disappeared, running fast.

"Too bad!" said the man from Laramie. "No man here knows anything about these holes. But we'll do the best we can. So come on."

He descended first and the others came quickly after him, all soon reaching the choked and narrow gallery through which Buffalo Bill and Murdock had dug and fought their way.

They came to the "dog hole" through which they had burrowed, and where the temple coin had been covered over with the earth thrown down. But they did not dream of the coin under their feet as they scrambled through the hole.

Wild Bill, leading the way, a lantern in one hand and a revolver in the other, watched the floor of the passage closely; and soon he made a discovery, which he announced.

"I've been looking for them—and there they are; marks made by the boots of Cody. And here are other tracks with them—probably Murdock's. They were going straight on in the direction we're taking; so we're sure on the right track."

Nomad whooped his joy over the discovery, and wanted to press his fingers in the boot tracks, to make sure that they were real.

"Waugh! Et's a happy thing ter see 'em!" he declared. "Et proves thet Buffler got out er thet joss house, anyhow. So he warn't killed in thar, and Sam Wah was mistook in thet. Yer cain't kill Cody easy."

"Right-o!" cried Wild Bill, as gleefully. "You're an ombray that's always guessing right when it comes to Buffalo Bill. Now, hotfoot it after me, pards, and we'll soon see where he is and who's with him."

They had not gone far when they beheld the shine of a light.

That stopped them.

"Comin' this erway," said Nomad. "Chinks, I reckon."

They waited in silence until the swaying light came much nearer; then, to their delight, they discovered that it was from a lantern carried by Sam Wah, who was still clad in the mask and robe of Yu Lee.

"Me come now gittee you," said Sam Wah, as he met them.

"Do ye know whar Cody is?" demanded Nomad.

"Me takee you to him," said Sam Wah.

"Waugh! Ye will? Lead on ter wonst."

Sam Wah turned about, becoming now their guide,

and led them out of the passage in a little while, by way of a hidden door which they would have passed undiscovered.

They had mounted again to the floor on which the joss house was located, that being the first, or ground, floor of the building.

Soon they saw the light of another lantern.

"Him there!" said Sam Wah.

He darted away again, leaving them to go forward without him.

"That you, Cody?" Wild Bill called.

They were overjoyed when Buffalo Bill answered.

Soon the two parties had joined.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

A noisy fight had broken out somewhere near.

"Ther chinks air at et ag'in, hammer an' tongs," cried Nomad.

"Particularly tongs," laughed Wild Bill. "It's a case of devil kill devil; though I'll admit Sam Wah seems a right good sort."

"Wharfore is ther row at, anyhow?" Nomad asked. "Fust off, et seems sort o' forrud, an' then et seems in t'other direction. This is a reg'lar Echo Cave down hyer."

Having located the direction at last they moved toward the sounds, though they had no thought of getting close enough to the fight to imperil themselves.

But the fighting ended almost as quickly as it had begun. Probably no more than eight or ten men were engaged, if that many; they had simply made a terrific noise. The Americans had discovered that was usually the case in Chinese fighting.

Soon they came to a wider place in the gallery; and in it they saw two dead men.

Before they could take a look at the bodies they heard a pattering of feet.

"Coming this way!" said Buffalo Bill. "Douse the glims."

The lanterns went out with startling suddenness.

"On'y one man," grumbled Nomad.

He came near soon, running without a light.

"A Chinaman!" thought the scout.

As the man passed the scout stuck out his foot, and down the runner went in a heap.

Before he could rise the scout was on top of him.

"A light now!" cried the scout.

The lanterns were lighted.

Then it was seen that the prisoner was a Chinaman, who seemed young. He was somewhat fleshy and had a smooth, plump skin, his face being moon-shaped and girlish in appearance.

Having heard the description of Yu Lee so many times, Buffalo Bill, as well as his friends, leaped to the swift and correct conclusion that their prisoner was the On Leon Tong leader, Yu Lee.

When they taxed him with it he stared stolidly, even defiantly, but made no denial.

Swinging his lantern round, old Nomad looked at the bodies on the floor.

A whoop of surprise broke from his lips.

"By all ther chink josses o' heathendom!" he howled. "What does yer think o' this? Hyer's Sam Wah, deader'n a stun!"

It was a surprising discovery. But a minute or so before, as it had seemed, the leader of the Hep Sing Tong men had been with them, talking with them, guiding them; now he lay dead in the passage, still clad in the grewsome robe and headpiece which had been the property of his enemy.

The On Leon Tong leader stared as hard as the white men when he saw the dead face of his foe; then his eyes shone with sudden excitement and triumph.

"Velly dead!" he said. "It velly good thing, too; and makee my all fliends muchee happy; he bad man—leader of the Hep Sing Tong; comee here from 'Flisco, killee my fliends."

He spat his hate at the dead man.

"Waugh!" gurgled Nomad. "What does yer think o' thet fer rattlesnake pizen?"

"It's clear to be seen," said Jameson, "ther wa'n't no love lost between 'em."

"Never was any between 'em ter lose."

Nomad stripped back the robe.

"What we goin' ter do?" he asked.

Taking advantage of the momentary distraction caused by the discovery, the leader of the On Leon Tong made a quick jump that put him beyond the reach of the scout's hand; the next moment he was springing along the gallery as if for his life.

Nomad and Jameson pitched up their revolvers.

"Let him go!" said Buffalo Bill.

"But he's ther boss murder chink o' all!" howled the trapper.

"Still we don't want to kill him. Probably we can capture him again."

"Prob'ly yer cain't," growled Nomad.

Yu Lee being out of sight, they turned again to the body of Sam Wah, speculating about his death.

"It was a knife got him," said Nomad, making an examination. "Co't him right hyer under ther ribs. Done, too, endurin' of that little fight we war lissenin' to a while ergo. Waal, he's gone under! Maybe et ends this hyer bloody chink war. Anyway, he was some'at white ef his skin was yaller."

Finding some boxes, by rummaging a deserted room, they made a stretcher of the boards thus secured; and

with it they carried the body of Sam Wah as they went on. The other body they left where they had found it.

They were not disturbed in their search for an exit out of the underground galleries; so that, being relieved of that fear, they at length found their way out, coming into the rooms behind Moy Wing's restaurant; thence down to the street in front of the restaurant.

Buffalo Bill looked at his watch.

"Two o'clock in the morning," he said. "I feel as if I'd been in there a whole day."

"Seems to me," commented Murdock, "that I've been in there a whole year!"

The body of Sam Wah was taken to the police station and turned over to the coroner.

The next morning Moy Wing was captured; though he declared, when Jameson stopped him and made him a prisoner, that he had no intention of trying to get away.

"Me have done nothing," he said.

Perhaps it was true. They could prove nothing against him worthy of punishment, under the laws of Cyanide.

But his capture brought about one thing. He knew of the disappearance of the joss money and was much concerned about it; he thought the white men had taken it.

"We haven't taken it," Buffalo Bill told him, when brought face to face with him, "but I know where it is. Some of the Chinese thugs held up Bent Murdock and took his money. If you will see that his money is returned to him I will tell you where you can find the joss money; that's a fair offer."

How he accomplished it Moy Wing would never confess, for he was a sly dog; but the next night, sending for Buffalo Bill, he showed him the money taken from Bent Murdock, every dollar of it.

"Now where joss money?" he said.

And Buffalo Bill told him; so that the Chinamen found the money belonging to the priests of their joss house.

With the death of Sam Wah the deadly tong war came to a sudden end. How many Chinamen lost their lives in it was never known. There were a few Chinese funerals, of a quiet character.

Report came soon that Sam Wah's men, such as lived through the war, were again in San Francisco.

Yu Lee was not again found.

With the final statement that when Brodie Towne fully conquered the opium habit and made a new man of himself Miss Nellie Kelso married him, we bring this tale to a close.

THE END.

The next number (450) will contain "Buffalo Bill's Secret Message; or, Professor Six and the Cipher."



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THROWING THE RIATA.

The skill shown by cattle men in throwing the riata, or lasso, often approaches the marvelous. What is more wonderful than a duel between Mexican vaqueros, in which the only weapon used were their riatas? The victor overcame the other by throwing his noose so that his enemy's noose passed right through it, and the conqueror lassoed the other man's arms against his side and jerked him from his steed.

Among other wonderful feats illustrating the skill of the victorious man, was his lassoing an antelope running at high speed one hundred feet away. To make the test more extraordinary, he would pick out one of the animal's feet, and get the noose around that alone.

A gentleman, who wielded a riata for many years, and probably knows as much about throwing the lasso as any man on the Pacific Coast, was asked if the feats referred to above were possible.

"The Mexican may have won the duel by lassoing his adversary, riata and all," was the answer. "It is not an uncommon thing for them to settle their differences by such a fight, and I have heard of the trick of ringing the other man's rope; but if that man can catch an antelope one hundred feet away, by the foot or any other way, he is a better riata man than I ever encountered. In the first place, very few men are strong enough to throw a rope such a distance. Then, an ordinary riata is only fourteen or sixteen yards long—twenty yards is a very long one. So, you see, a forty-foot throw is a pretty good one."

How to Treat a Riata.

He was asked to explain how to throw a lasso, and consented to do so.

"The first thing about this business is to have a perfect riata. If you have one perfectly stretched, oiled, and in a thoroughly good condition, you can throw well; if your rope is kinky or uneven, you will find it impossible to do accurate work."

"What do you consider a good riata?"

"Well, I can only tell you how a good one is made. First, the rawhide is cut in thin strips, as long as possible, and half tanned with the hair on. Then, these strips are soaked and stretched over a block. Then, they are braided into a rope, care being taken, of course, to pull the strands as tight as possible. When the riata is made, it should be buried for a week, ten days, or even a fortnight, in the sand. It takes up moisture from the ground, without getting hard. Soaking it in water won't do, nor will anything else that I know of, except, as I say, burying it. When the riata is resurrected, it should again be left for a time stretched over a block, with a weight to hold it taut. Then the hair should be sandpapered off the outside, and when the riata is greased with mutton tallow, and properly noosed, it is ready for use. Every vaquero that pretends to take care of his apparatus will bury his riata and stretch it every six or eight months.

"A hair rope does not make a good riata. It is useful to stretch around camp at night to keep snakes away. For some reason snakes will not cross a hair rope.

"Now, as to throwing it:

Throwing With Either Hand.

"The riata, say, is hanging from the horn of the saddle—not tied, but ready for use. No vaquero who understands his trade ties his rope to his saddle. He knows that his life may depend on his ability to let go of his rope in an instant, and he isn't going to chance killing himself or his horse. You see, the vaquero might be on a side hill, and a bull or steer he wishes to catch be on a trail below him, and the ground between them be too steep to admit of his riding down to it. Now, suppose the noose, instead of catching around the horns of the steer, should circle his neck and draw down to his shoulders? Accidents are, of course, as likely to happen in catching cattle as anything else, and give a bull such a hold, he could pull a house, let alone a mustang. That would be one case where it would be very handy to let go quickly. Then, a man is likely to get his hand caught, and if he can't let his rope go free, he is likely to lose a finger or two.

"Our vaquero is trotting along with his rope hanging at his saddlebow or fastened behind him. He sees a deer or whatever else he wants to catch, and grabs his rope with the left hand, if he is a left-handed man, though a man, to really excel in this business, should be ambidextrous. A right-handed man can, under ordinary circumstances, rope a steer, but he has frequently to turn his horse to gain a good position. Now, it sometimes happens that your horse is in a position where you can't turn; then it would be awkward unless you could throw with either hand. I usually throw with my left hand, though I can use either.

Never a Long Noose.

"I take up the rope from the saddlebow, so."

He lifted his riata in his right hand. His little finger held the standing end of the rope, the third and middle fingers supported the coil, and the noose dangled from his first finger, while his thumb steadied the whole rope, and held it from slipping. The coils were not more than a foot or a foot and a half in diameter. The noose was the same size.

"That's a smaller noose than you would use on the range, is it not?"

"No; the vaquero never carries his noose long. If he did it would be constantly getting tangled up in the horse's legs. He makes it larger when he swings it. But to get back to the process of lassoing. As our cowboy gets close to his quarry he takes the noose in his lasso hand. I will use my left, as it is a trifle handier for me. He grips the rope, not too firmly, holding the standing part and the side of the noose about half the length of the loop away from the knot.

That is to enable him to swing the noose so that it will fall open. If he holds it at the knot he will throw a long, narrow noose that is very likely to cross and kink.

Kept Clear in a Thicket.

"Meanwhile, I, representing our cowboy, hold the remaining coils in my other hand, only changing the position of my forefinger so as to secure better control of the coils. Then, comes the third manœuvre—enlarging the noose. Of course, you have to have a larger noose than one a foot in diameter to drop over a steer's horns forty feet away. The noose is enlarged by swinging the noose in your lasso hard until the centrifugal force pulls it out the size you wish—this is the reason you do not grasp it too firmly—letting go with the other hand, of course, as many coils as are necessary to make the noose the right size. Now, you have the noose in the air, you do not cease making it circle around your head until you let it go. When the noose has been let out to the right size the next trouble is to keep it open, and to avoid entangling it in the brush or other surrounding obstructions. You keep it open, as I said, by holding the noose from quarter to half its length from the knot, and by a peculiar twist of the wrist that is only attainable by practice. To keep it clear of the brush is often a more difficult job, for the cowboy is not always in a clear place when he wants to throw his rope. Then it is that his judgment comes into play and determines whether his cast is a lost one or not. I have seen vaqueros swing a lasso swiftly almost in the midst of a thicket, and keep it clear without losing speed, and then let it drive straight as an arrow between two close trees, and rope an object that could not pass where the noose had gone. Such skill, to be sure, comes only after long practice.

As the Steer Jumps Along.

"Well, now we have got the noose circling about the vaquero's head, and the next thing is to let it fly. There is not much to describe about this part of throwing a riata, important though it may be. It is only incessant practice that will enable a man to make a certain cast. The main thing is to swing the rope just long enough—neither so long as to give it a sidewise motion when you throw it, nor short enough to prevent its getting all the force you require. Then, the riata man must throw at a particular limb or projection. This thing of tossing blindly at an object and trusting to luck that the animal will get into the rope somehow will not do. You must pick out your mark as carefully as if you were shooting at it, and then time it. A steer jumping along changes his position constantly as regards you. If you throw at his head high up, the chances are that it will be away down when your rope reaches him, and you will overthrow. Now, if you pick out a foot you must reckon so that that foot will be off the ground when your rope reaches it. The noose does not travel like a bullet, and this element of time is most important.

"Of even more importance is it that the distances are gauged correctly. You remember I spoke about holding the coils lightly in two or three fingers. Well, that is done in order that as many coils as may be considered necessary may be let go. If you are wielding a riata you know that each of your coils is almost two feet or two and one-half feet long. So, if you want to lasso something twenty feet away you let go ten coils.

"As to letting go, you simply open your hand at the correct time, and the rope slips off.

Two Turns Around the Horn.

"But, even after you have roped your steer, your work is not over. Almost any animal can pull you from your horse, and to prevent this you must get your rope around the horn of your saddle. There is where you have to be quick. There are two ways of making this hitch that are used ordinarily. The one I prefer is simply to take two turns around the horn, taking care that the second turn comes lower and over-

laps the other. No pull in the world could make that rope slip, while I can, simply by throwing off one turn, let it all slide off. This other fashion, which is really taking a 'half-hitch' around the horn, holds just as fast, but you have to push the rope through to loosen it. You see, in making this sudden twist, a finger is very likely to get caught, and I have known many fingers being taken off before such a hitch could be unfastened.

"It is often advisable to take an extra twist around anything you have lassoed, and this is done by simply throwing a coil. Practice, again, is the only thing that can teach this.

"Now you have the whole theory of throwing a rope.

"There are four sorts of throws, but they are all made alike, only the position of the arm being different. They are the overthrow, the underthrow, the sidethrow, and the backthrow."

"Backthrow?"

"Yes, backthrow—catching an object behind you—something that you need not even see. That sounds difficult, does it? Well, you stand behind me, and you can see it done."

We took our station twenty feet behind, quite out of sight, of course. He swung the loop around his head, and, without turning, let it fly backward. It circled us exactly, and, by pulling it quickly, he had our arms pinioned to our sides.

"Are there any more trick throws?" we asked.

Danger At the Rear.

"Lots of them. I never put myself up as a crack riata man, and I am out of practice now, but I can lay the noose on the ground at my feet and kick it around your neck, or pick it off the ground from my horse and land it around you while the horse is going at full speed, and do lots of things like that, but none of them are any good. That backthrow has been used by the Mexican highwaymen to considerable advantage. You see, in that country, the traveler always looks out for danger from the rear, and is prepared for it, but when a pleasant horseman rides past him, playing with his riata, and wishing him 'Good day,' as he passes, he is likely to consider the danger as gone by, as well as the man. That has caused the death of a good many. The bandit gets the right distance ahead and then lassoes him as I did you. A touch of his spur jerks his victim from the saddle, and that ends it."

"How is the lasso as a weapon of defense?"

"Good. A quick riata man can beat a fellow with a pistol at fairly close quarters."

"How?"

"Well, here is a pistol. Put it in your pocket and draw it on me as I come toward you."

We did as he directed. We had not raised the weapon when the noose was around our hand and the pistol was jerked a dozen feet.

The Sea Lion Most Difficult.

"Try again, and tighter," he said.

We did so. The pistol was not jerked from our hand this time, but before we could snap it he had thrown a coil around our neck and pulled our pistol hand up over our shoulder. In another instant a second coil was around our body, and both arms were fastened firmly to our sides. We could not move that pistol an inch. No clearer demonstration of the use of the lasso as a weapon of defense was possible.

"What is the most difficult animal, in your opinion, to catch with the lasso?" we asked.

"A sea lion," answered the rope thrower. "I have caught them. They go right through the noose. The only way to get them is to throw the rope around his neck and back of one flipper. A hog is hard to catch, too. He pulls his legs out of a noose without half trying, and you can't hold him by the neck or body. The only way is to get him like the sea lion—back of one foreleg."

TURTLE FOOD ON THE AMAZON.

Turtles and farina, taken together, represent to those who live on the Amazon, be they white, negro, or Indian, or one of the numerous crossbreds, what the salmon does to Alaska Indian and rice to the Mongolian. A short run of salmon in the Alaska rivers, a crop failure in the paddy fields of China, a hurricane in the South Sea Islands, all reduce to the same thing—famine. On the Amazon a shortage of turtles may be tided over by a plentitude of farina, or vice versa; a failure of both turtles and farina in the same year brings great and widespread distress.

Farina is a crude locally made product of the roots of the mandioca, a further refinement of which results in the tapioca of commerce. Tapioca is the pure starch of the root, farina the starch mixed with a woody fibre, the latter imparting a yellowish color to the compound. Farina, under a number of different names, is more or less of a staple with the natives in all of tropical America from the West Indies to Paraguay.

The methods of preparation vary slightly in different localities, but the object in view is always the same—the elimination of the juice of the mandioca, which is of a highly poisonous nature. Fortunately, the latter is highly soluble, and is therefore easily got rid of by washing and straining.

The Brazilian apparatus for this purpose is an Indian contrivance, and is in every respect similar to the one employed by the aborigines of the interior of British Guiana, from five hundred to one thousand miles from the Amazon. It consists of a long flexible cylinder made of the hard outer skin of some canelike plant, plaited in such a form that a longitudinal pull reduces its diameter. This being filled with the moistened pulp of the mandioca is contracted by the attaching of a weight to a loop in its lower end, the juice being caught in pans placed underneath to receive it.

A second washing and pressing render the farina fit for eating. A rather amusing expedient is occasionally employed by the Indian women to facilitate this operation.

Youngsters Never Take to it Quietly.

A large hammock is suspended between the ends of two cylinders of mandioca pulp, and into this are thrown a half dozen or more of the first children to come to hand. The edges of the hammock are then knotted together above the struggling prisoners.

Whether the youngsters take their confinement in good part or otherwise, they at least never take it quietly, the ensuing struggle squeezing the mandioca dry in a fraction of the time in which it would have been accomplished by the application of a dead weight.

A remarkable thing about this juice of the mandioca is that though it contains so large a quantity of prussic acid that it is invariably fatal to a man, or even a dog or cow that happens to drink it, the addition of certain herbs known to the Indians renders it perfectly harmless and admirably suited to the making of sauces and seasonings for fish and turtle. A most delicious sauce is that called arubi, which is made of the mandioca juice boiled down before the precipitation of the starch or tapioca and seasoned with capsicum peppers. It is kept in stone bottles for several weeks before using, and makes a most appetizing relish.

In British Guiana a similar sauce made by the Indians and called "pepper pot" is highly esteemed by the English, and may be had at the leading hotels of Georgetown.

Another sauce, tucupi, is made by the Amazonian Indians from the pure juice of the mandioca, and is much more common in the interior than arubi. This is made by heating the liquid for several days in succession and seasoning it with

peppers and small fishes; when old it has much the taste of anchovy paste, and a smell which would put to shame the famous salmon-head oil of the Alaska Indians.

Amazon Turtle Grows to Great Size.

It is generally made up as a liquid, but certain of the tribes on the Japura make it up in the form of a black paste, calling it tucupixuna, or black tucupi. The Indians on the Tapajos, where fish are scarce, are said to occasionally season tucupi with Sauba ants. It is there used chiefly as a sauce to tacaca, another preparation from the root of the mandioca, consisting of the starch beaten up in boiling water.

The fresh-water turtle of the Amazon grows to a great size, especially on the upper river, where full-grown ones three feet in length, two in width, and weighing two hundred pounds are often seen. Every house has its little pond or corral to hold a stock of these animals through the season of dearth, the wet months. Those who have Indians in their employ send them out for a month when the waters are low to select a stock; others purchase their supply.

The price of turtles, like that of all other articles of food, has risen greatly with the gradual growth of the cities of the upper Amazon. Bates, a British entomologist, tells how the price per turtle increased from eighteen cents in 1850 to two dollars in 1860. Since the latter period the increase has continued in almost the same ratio, for in Manaos to-day full-grown Alyussa turtles often bring twenty-five to thirty dollars.

The flesh is very tender, nourishing, and wholesome, but like the partridge of the minister of Louis XIV., cannot be eaten continuously without palling somewhat upon the taste. The native women cook it in various ways. The entrails are chopped up and made into a delicious soup called sara-patel, this being generally boiled in a kettle made of the upper concave shell of the animal.

Another appetizing dish is made by slashing up the tender breast meat without cutting it from the shell, laying strips of the green fat of the belly in the incisions, scattering tapioca and flour over the whole, and baking.

FISH THAT WALK.

It may seem absurd to speak of fishes as walking. The flying fish is well known, but its flight looks much like swimming in the air. We naturally think of fishes as living always in water as being incapable, in fact, of living anywhere else. But nature maintains no hard and fast lines of distinction between animal life which belongs to the land and that which belongs to the water. If we can believe the accounts of naturalists, there are fishes that traverse dry land.

It is reported that Doctor Francis Day, of Indiana, has collected several instances of the migration of fishes by land from one piece of water to another.

A party of English officers were upon one occasion incamped in a certain part of India, when their attention was attracted by a rustling sound in the grass and leaves. Investigation showed it to be caused by myriads of little fishes that were making for one direction and were passing slowly on. There were hundreds of them moving by using their side and small fins as feet; now upright, now falling down, squirming, bending, rolling over, regaining their finny feet, and again pressing on.

These fishes were the famous climbing perch, about which so much has been said and written, and they were passing over the country to avoid a drought. When the stream in which they have been spending the season dries up, they scale the banks, and, directed by some marvelous instinct, crawl to another.

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